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Cultural Heritage of Ancient India

S K MAITY

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abhinav publications

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To

HIRANMOYEE (Mother), KIRANMOYEE (Unti),
BIJAN KUMARI (Bhābi), BINAPANI (Wife),
TUNU (Sister), BULBUL (Sister), GOURI (Sister),
and MARY (Sister)

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Author's Works

Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period (cir. 300-550 A.D.), 1st Ed. Calcutta, 1957, 2nd Ed. Delhi, 1970.

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CONTENTS

	Preface	vii
I.	Religion, Art and Culture	1
II.	Culture of the Mauryas, Kushāṇas and Guptas	38
III.	Education and Culture	57
IV.	Cultural Significance of Ajantā Women	77
V.	Standard of Morality and Justice in Jātakas	84
VI.	Coinage and Culture	91
VII.	India and Her Neighbours in Trade and Culture	112
	Select Bibliography	126
	Index	131
	Plates	

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PREFACE

Originally prepared for the benefit of my post-graduate and research students, and continuing education centre of our University, the present study in its final form has covered a much wider ground. The colourful complexities of early Indian socio-religious life and culture often present a baffling picture for the Indians themselves. Thus, the predicament of others is easily understandable. I have attempted to present a clear but authentic account of the various facets of life in their historical perspective. But in some cases I have pointed out how a remarkable piece of painting or sculpture gives the historian as well as a casual onlooker an insight into the life and culture of a particular age in ancient India. For instance, two pieces of sculpture in Mahābalipuram depict the marriage ceremony of Hara and Pārvatī; Menakā holds the hands of Pārvatī along with Daksha, and Brahmā, as priest, is present there to solemnise the marriage. A few attendants are also present there. In the next panel Hara tenderly holds the hand of Pārvatī (his wife) immediately after the marriage has been solemnised for the retiring room. These are the unique and fascinating picture of a Hindu marriage ceremony engraved on stone. There are numerous-such pieces of paintings and sculptures literally strewn all over the country. The chapter on religion, art and culture evaluates the worth of this

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treasure in Indian history. The culture of the Mauryas, Kushāṇas and Guptas have focussed a new colour of life; and the standard of moral and social justice in our *Smriti* literature as well as in our *Jātakas* have added a special significance to our cultural heritage; Indian women are the major contributors of this culture. A chapter on education and learning has highlighted the teacher-student relationship of this period. The system of coinage and the significance of coins in evaluating the socio-cultural life of the period has also been discussed separately. India's maritime and cultural relation with her Eastern and Western neighbours formed a separate chapter in our national history.

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CHAPTER I

RELIGION, ART AND CULTURE

HAS India a culture of her own and, if so, how does it differ from that of other countries? That India has a view of life of her own, a special outlook on essential problems, which has persisted throughout her history would hardly be denied by any one. But it is not so easy to define what the essential elements of that culture are. Our culture is more spiritualized than that of other countries. T.S. Elliot in his *Observation on Culture* states that the basis of culture is religious beliefs. It is Christianity that forms the basis of European culture. The pre-eminence of Hinduism in India gives to the Indian culture its special significance.

India has a long and continuous history extended over five thousand years. Besides, it has a population which, with the sole exception of China, is the largest single aggregation of humanity in the whole course of world's history. It has also had a way of life and

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culture, no doubt modified continuously by outside contacts, but essentially Indian, based on doctrines and ideas developed indigenously. This way of life has found noble expression in classical and modern literature, in art and architecture, which display an unbounded creative energy and which have had a lasting influence on most Asian countries, in philosophies, religions, and religious systems which continue to be vital forces even in the world of today, when a civilization is so extensive in space and time.

Such a culture, ancient and persistent, and variously adopted in different times and climes, naturally develops complex forms of outward manifestation which baffle the superficial intellects looking for simple truths. To say that Hinduism has for centuries been the mainstay of Indian culture is hardly enough to explain its roots, since Hinduism itself is nothing short of multiverse, with a mind-boggling range of philosophical systems, religious beliefs and practices, from the highest flight of metaphysics to the simplest folk cults.

Outstanding Essentials of Indian Culture

Tradition of tolerance, sense of synthesis, universal outlook, respect for the individual, emphasis on the right conduct, Sanskrit and artistic heritage, social structure and the aims of life, attitude towards the womanhood, *Dama*, *Dāna* and *Dayā* (DA, DA, DA), harmony with nature, protest movements—Buddhism, Jainism and Bhakti Movement are the very essence of Indian life and culture.

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Tolerance and Synthesis

The Indo-Greeks, Śakas, Scythians, Parthians, Pallavas, Kushāṇas, Hūṇas, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Muslims and others from time to time came in waves and settled down in the Indian subcontinent from the dawn of human civilization. Lord Krishṇa in the *Gītā* proclaims the fundamentals of Hindu thought that religion is not a matter of 'exclusive dogma'. A wide tolerance is the very essence of Hindu teachings. It is this sense of tolerance and charity that gives harmony to the inner life of our culture.

While the basic tenets and even the outward forms of this great religion have remained unchanged through many centuries, the interplay of forces generated by the toleration of other religions and ways of life led to a continuous re-interpretation of its doctrines and a readjustment of its approach to the problems of life. And the impact of Islam and Christianity was perhaps responsible for the re-emphasis of monotheistic teachings in medieval and early modern India. Thus the religious revivals from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries put new vigour into the old body of Hinduism. Finally, it led to one of the most vital movements in modern India, the Great Reformation of Hinduism, based on a re-examination of Hindu teachings in the light of Christianity.

A continuous synthesis is a part of our national life. At the very beginning the assimilation of the Aryan and Dravidian culture laid the very basis of Hindu Civilization, and the village and family life and broad legal system are the outcome of this

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synthesis. The development of Indian art also bears witness to this great process. The figurines discovered at Mohenjodāro and Harappā might have relationship with Babylonian and Egyptian counterpart and the Mauryan art might have followed the tradition of Persepolis. The great Gandhara school of art definitely bears the stamp of Greek art. Similar is the case of painting. In the sixteenth century, the Great Mughals introduced and popularised Persian paintings in India. Within a short time Indian painters had mastery over it and a new Indo-Persian school enriched the artistic tradition of India. A similar process of assimilation and synthesis is going on today in all spheres of artistic activity.

Universal Outlook and Respect for the Individual

From our attitude of tolerance and synthesis of new ideas and concepts follows what we call universal outlook. Whatever the limitations of Hindu social practices and the narrowness of our institutions, the geographical, religious and racial boundaries never stand in the way of accepting new values. There was never any refusal to learn from others or any resistance to ideas on the ground of their being foreign. Hindu thought has, therefore, accepted a continuous synthesis of ideas and ethical concept of Christianity and Islam. Similarly, the 'love laden soul' of the Buddha expressed through his stone sculptures manifested universal love and fellow-feeling. He also preached the gospel of '*Ahimsā*' (non-injury to animals) and thereby included the whole animal world within his religious purview. In later years Gandhiji also accepted

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this famous philosophic concept of Lord Buddha. Undoubtedly he claimed to his last days to be an orthodox Hindu and died with the name of Rāma on his lips. In his opinion, 'If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I would simply say: Search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth ... Denial of God we have known. Denial of truth we have not known.'

Following the path of truth the Vaishṇavites saw Lord Krishṇa as personal God and He became 'friend, philosopher and guide' to His devotees, ultimately a religious upsurge flooded the Indian sub-continent. Now, the restless west, which is a famous seat of material civilization, plunged themselves into the new Hare-Krishṇa movement. Undoubtedly they are having solace and comfort in the lap of Lord Krishṇa. Hare-Krishṇa centres are established at Mayapur in Nadia district of West Bengal, *Brindaban* and many other places in India and abroad.

Again, it is our fundamental belief that every human being has in him a spark of the divine. It is in the very nature of man that he can, by right conduct and by right knowledge, attain illumination and attain the Godhood. This is also the basic concept of Buddhism. The Buddhahood can be attained by every one by process of spiritual evolution. Finally, according to the Hindu concept 'individual soul is a part of the Universal Soul'.

Expression of Conduct and Sanskrit Heritage

Our culture is not only a matter of ideas; it finds

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its expression through our conduct and behaviour in society. The attitude of sobriety, softness, amiability, simplicity with straightforwardness are the basis of our conduct. As a result of the famous Bhakti movement in India the Vaishṇavites have always maintained the attitude of 'humbler than the grass'. Moreover, the respect for the elders, honouring the aged and the wise, code of ethical conduct in family and social life are the basic factors of our culture. European and other foreign cultures only touched the periphery of Hindu society.

Sanskrit literature extends from the time of the Vedas even up to this day and holds a unique position in world literature. It has given abiding expression to the ideas, aspirations, code of conduct and fine sense of beauty of a whole sub-continent; and in epic poetry, drama, lyric, song, prose, even in technical subject none surpasses our literature. The Vedas, Purāṇas, Upanishads, Gītā, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, works of Kālidāsa, Bāṇa and many others have made lasting contribution to human society. For the better understanding of our art and culture, we have to say a few words about the two Great Epics, Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, which maintained great standard in our national life.

Mahābhārata

The Mahābhārata contains about 100,000 couplets; the subject is borrowed from the heroic legend 'The Great Bharata Story of War'. Symbolic of the struggle between the Good and the Evil, it recounts the inexorable rivalry between the two branches of

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the descendants of Bharata. A terrible war took place, in which tribes from all over India and neighbouring countries participated, opposing the one hundred Kauravas and their cruel chiefs to the five Pāṇḍava brothers, allies of Lord Krishṇa. For eighteen days the battle raged with such violence that the heavens seemed to have disappeared behind a veil of flying arrows. The dead accumulated, the Kaurava leaders perished one after another. Thus the five brothers completed their earthly mission; only Yudhisthira ascended the heaven alive but all others went there after death.

An epic with a sad ending but softened by the Indian notion of destiny. The Mahābhārata, one of the great sources of Hinduism, is an account of its beliefs. It is, above all, a verse-chronicle of Krishṇa, the real hero of the epic, an incarnation of god Vishṇu, whose divine nature reveals itself in magisterial interventions.

There are hundreds of episodes which fruitfully soften the horror of the Kurukshetra war, full of charm, interposed as a form of digression; and they are based on high social ethics. For instance, Damayantī's devotion, tinged with unfailing fidelity, succeeds in saving her husband, king Nala, from the demon of gambling. The deep love of Sāvitrī and Satyavān, Behula and Lakshindar persuades the god of death (Yama) to give back their husbands.

But the most admirable and notable is the Bhāgavad-Gītā (the Song of the Lord). In it, Krishṇa revealing Himself as Bhagavān (Supreme Lord), destroys Arjuna's fear at the moment of going to the battle-field. He teaches him the philosophy of action without attachment, leading to deliverance by the

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way of the *Bhakti*, the way of ardent love, of union with the Blessed One, of "participation with Him even in this life"!

He attains appeasement; He in whom all desires are engulfed as the waters are engulfed by the sea which grows full and yet remains immutable—but not he who desires his desires. The man who stripped of all desires, marches without covetousness, without 'my' and 'I', will attain appeasement. This is the doctrine of Brahma. He who has acquired it will no longer lose his way. And if he possesses it in the final hour he will merge in Brāhmaṇ.

Rāmāyaṇa

The other epic, the Rāmāyaṇa, is composed by Vālmīki by assembling the scattered elements of a long oral tradition. It tells of the infancy and youth of the hero Rāma, son of king Daśaratha, and of his marriage with Princess Sītā, 'born from a furrow in the ground'. He won her, like Arjuna in the Mahābhārata, by bending a prodigious bow which his rivals could not even lift. And here again the struggle originated in the clash between Good and Evil. The jealousy of his father's favourite wife brings about Rāma's exile to the forest. Lakshmaṇa and Sītā implore him to permit them to go with him. Rāma at once accepted Lakshmaṇa as his companion in the forest life. Sītā, however, put forward the following appeal to her husband:

"If thou leavest now, descendant of Raghu (the Sun), for the impassable forest, I will walk before thee, crushing the thorn ... Nothing there will hurt

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me. Under the vaults of the palace, in chariots, in the wake of birds, wherever it falls, the shadow of a husband's feet takes precedence... I will go into the wayless forest, untrodden by man, filled with every sort of beast, inhabited by bands of tigers; I will live happily in the forest, as in my father's house, without concern for the three worlds, concerning myself only with the sole law of wife. Always obedient, dutiful, chaste, I will find my pleasure with you, hero, in the forest with its sweet fragrances."

When Rāma refuses, pointing out the unhappiness of life in the forest, she again insists: 'Separated from thee, Rāma, I would have to renounce life... If I were by your side, Indra himself... the king of gods, could not attack me by force... O pure heart, my love will render me inaccessible to impurity. I will follow in the steps of my husband, for the husband is the supreme divinity. After death a blessed union will be given with thee forever... Any woman in this world who has been given by her parents to a man, with ritual waters and according to his law, belongs to him in the other world as well, O magnanimous one.' Sītā is finally allowed to accompany Rāma to the forest, but the chief of the demons, Rāvaṇa, kidnaps her by trickery and carries her off to his residence in Laṅkā. To deliver Sītā, Rāma becomes the ally of the 'army of monkeys' led by Hanumān. He kills Rāvaṇa and, his exile ended, he returns triumphantly with Sītā and Lakshmaṇa to Ayodhyā. However, his suspicion about the fidelity of Sītā during her imprisonment begins to nag him; he repudiates her. She is prepared to be burned at the stake, but the god of fire spares her, attesting her innocence. After some years at Ayodhyā, just to please his subjects,

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Sītā is banished into the hermitage of Vālmīki; there she gave birth to twins, Lava and Kusha.

The Rāmāyaṇa is surely the work that has enjoyed the most extraordinary circulation throughout India itself and the countries under Indian influence. It gave rise to a whole Rāma-inspired literature, expressing itself especially in drama, music and art. It is found in all forms of Indian art. It also offers the knowledge of Rāma and Sītā—models of the Indian soul—the establishment of a popular national cult, a sort of Rāman religion.

Artistic Heritage

'Indian art has contributed a unique chapter in the history of human civilization', says A.B. Havell. Its continued vitality, its astonishing range—specially in the field of painting, sculpture, and architecture, no less than the lasting sense of beauty and power it conveys, has placed the artistic heritage among the major cultural legacies of the world. The architecture that created the temples of Madurai, Tanjore, Khajuraho, Orissa, the rock-cut pagodas of Mahabalipuram, the sculpture that executed the Mathura image of Buddha, Trimurti of Elephantā, the famous Natarāja of Tanjore and the paintings which had its efflorescence in the haunting world of beauty in the caves of Ajantā and Ellorā, and thousand others, have nothing to lose by comparison with the whole artistic wealth of Europe during its entire history. When to this is added the achievements of the Indo-Saracenic schools which produced Taj-Mahal of Agra, Mughal-Rajput paintings, we have a variety and magnificence

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which may well be claimed to be without parallel. And Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly said, "It is not some secret doctrine or esoteric knowledge that has kept India vital and going through these long ages, but a tender humanity, a varied and tolerant culture and a deep understanding of life and its mysterious ways. Her abundant vitality flows out from age to age in her magnificent literature and art, though we have only a small part of it with us and much lies hidden or has been destroyed by nature or man's vandalism. The *Trimurti* in the Elephantā caves might well be the many-faced statue of India itself, powerful, with compelling eyes, full of deep knowledge and understanding, looking down upon us."

Social Structure and Aim of Life

Society is the very basis of our great culture; it centred round the caste system, consisting of the Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śudras. Of course there are many out-castes and untouchables in the existing order of society. The first three classes enjoyed special privileges, for they are 'twice-born'. They receive religious training and are allowed to hear and recite the Vedas. The Śudras are at best second-class citizens, but they had definite status and definite rights. The Sacred Law lays down different scales of punishment and reward and different standards of conduct for these four classes. Each individual has his own special *dharma*, according to his place in the social order. The *dharma* of the Brāhmaṇa was to learn and to teach, that of the Kshatriya to govern justly and to fight, that of the Vaiśya to

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produce wealth, and that of the Śudra to serve others. And the higher ranks had in theory correspondingly heavier obligations. The Brāhmaṇas were expected to maintain a very austere life, and to refrain from what for the lower classes were legitimate pleasures of life, such as drinking and gambling. Though there was a plenty of evidence to show that often the Brāhmaṇa's life was not one of dignified austerity in practice, at least this was the ideal that was set before him. The Śudra, on the other hand, might gamble and drink to his heart's content without losing his caste. Each caste had its own particular customs with regard to marriage, trade and so on, and these were all part of the caste *dharma*; of course, these customs were challenged and altered from time to time.

Life's aims were *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Moksha*. *Dharma* clearly is not religion here, but the way of life prescribed in our Dharmaśāstras. It covered not only ethics but also religion and politics. *Artha*, on the other hand, covered productive and professional activity, gainful occupations and the promotion of social welfare; and Lakshmī was worshipped as the giver of prosperity and wealth. *Kāma* or the life of the senses, was equally an essential part of Indian culture. Though *Kāma* literally means desire, love, etc., in the context of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*, it signifies physical and artistic enjoyment, the life of the senses in the widest sense. As Vātsyayana in his Kāmasutra explains the mastery of 64 arts (*Kalās*) is essential for a Nāgaraka. It includes music, dance, poetry, artistic activities, etc. In India the normal life of sex was not looked down upon. This aspect of Hindu culture

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seems so strange to Europeans who, when they see our erotic sculpture or read our religious poems like *Gīta Govinda*, not to speak of love poetry, feel shocked at the frank treatment of love. Undoubtedly *moksha* is the ultimate object. All religions teach that the ultimate object of life is to obtain eternal life in God. According to our conception the soul is literated from the effects of its *Karma* and attains *mukti* (or *moksha*).

Again, the above four are closely associated with the four stages of life (*Āśramas*); they are *Brahmacharya*, *Gārhastha*, *Vānaprastha* and *Sanyāsa*. *Brahmacharya* or the first *Āśrama* is the period of study and character building. *Gārhasthāśrama* is the life of a householder, a family man with his social and other obligations. It covers the major part of man's life, he has to see that his children are married and settled down in life and to pay off the religious and social debts of his father and forefathers (*Pitri-rinas*). After that he can go for *Vānaprastha* and renounce his worldly life and live in a forest and live as a *Sanyāsī* for meditating at the feet of God for his final liberation.

Attitude Towards Womanhood

Indian woman as mother, wife and daughter held an honoured position in the family. Sītā, Damayantī, Behulā, Draupadī and Arundhatī gave to Indian women a position of high honour. Lopāmudrā, Ghoṣā, Viśvabārā composed Vedic songs and their intellectual and spiritual attainments are universally accepted. 'The lady is the house' is our popular saying. While the men would do their jobs outside,

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the women would look after their children and all other household works and there lies the total charm of family life. It is also equally true that our *Dharma-śāstras* clearly testify to the gradual degradation of the position of women. According to Manu, they should not be allowed to live independently. "A woman does not deserve independence; she is protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in youth, and by her sons in old age." In spite of that even today we have great respect, admiration and love for our womenfolk; and are always proud of our mother, wife, daughter and sister.

Dama, Dāna and Dayā (i.e. DA, DA, DA)

In our daily life Indian culture has emphasised three cardinal virtues. There is a parable in the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* in book five, verse two. Prajāpati, the ancestor of man, blessed his creation with a code of conduct consisting of three basic principles, viz., *Dama*, *Dāna* and *Dayā* i.e. restraint, charity and compassion. These are the basic qualities for which a man is revered and respected in India.

Now, what does *Dama* mean? It means literally restraint. It is the inner restraint of man, the domination over his base passions like *Kāma*, *Krodha*, *Lobha* and *Moha*—lust, anger, avarice, etc.—in fact it is the discipline which controls one's passions, regulates one's desires and restrains one's impulses that constitutes *Dama*.

What is *Dāna*? It means gift, what is given in charity. There is a famous story in the Mahābhārata. A half-golden mongoose entered the sacrificial hall

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of Yudhishthira, where lavish and valuable gifts had been given to Brāhmaṇas. There the mongoose boldly declared that all the king's gifts were not equal to the one ounce of barley given by a hungry man, for there was no merit in gifts given in expectation of rewards in heaven. So *Dāna* in the proper sense is not mere charity given out of one's abundance, but something which involves a real sacrifice, something dear and valuable which one shares with others.

What is *Dayā*? It is compassion. King Yudhishthira was on his last journey to heaven. Suddenly a stray dog accompanied him. He refused to enter heaven without the unclean dog. To him even heaven had no meaning, if he had to renounce compassion for the dog.

Harmony with Nature

Another important aspect of Indian culture is its harmony with nature. The mountains, rivers, trees, flowers and animals have a special significance in Indian life. There is no mountain range in India from the Himalaya to Sahyadri which is not somehow integrated with Indian life. The Himalaya is *devatātmā* and the mount Kailāsa is the abode of Śiva. The Vindhyas are also sacred; the Aravallis with Mount Abu and Ambā Devī are centres of pilgrimage. When we come to the rivers, it is not only the Ganges and the Yamuna that are sacred, but Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri and others are also holy. To each locality its river is as sacred as Ganga. The Peepal, Banian, *Neem* trees, *Tulasi*, etc., are also

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the useful part of our life. In fact the Hindu culture, like the Hindu temple, is permeated with reverence for nature. It is the harmony of man and nature that is the basic concept of our life and culture. The cow, Brahmanical bull are sacred animals; even birds like owl, pigeon are venerated.

Protest Movements—Buddhism, Jainism and Bhakti Movement

As early as the sixth century B.C. India witnessed a remarkable religious revolution which profoundly influenced the life and thought of our own people and millions of people outside this sub-continent. It was in some respects a positive reaction against the cumbersome rituals, great animal sacrifice and the annoying dominance of the priestly class which was based on Vedic religion. But viewed from the philosophical standpoint, however, it was a continuation of the metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads; and in course of time both Buddhism and Jainism developed certain ideals, ideologies and rituals inconsistent with Vedic philosophy and worship. Within a very narrow compass it is very difficult to explain the colourful and social character of the two protest movements, Buddhism and Jainism. We all know the story of a king who asked the blind men what an elephant was like. One, feeling its trunk, said: 'Like a chariot-shaft'; another, feeling its ear, said: 'Like a winnowing-fan'; and so on. The parable might well be applied to any attempts to write the whole history of Jainism and Buddhism within a few pages. A great variety of sculpture in

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stone and metal, monastery, temples and caves testify to the greatness of Jainism and Buddhism.

Jainism

Vardhamāna Mahāvīra is usually regarded as the founder of Jainism, although according to the Jainas he was but the last of a long series of teachers (called *Tirthankaras*) to whom their sect owes its origin and development. Of the twenty-three *Tirthankaras* mentioned in Jain literature, only one, Pārsvanāth, was probably a historical personage; the others are legendary figures unknown to history. Pārsvanāth is said to have been the son of a king of Banaras. He renounced the world and became an ascetic. His main teachings emphasised the spiritual value of non-injury (*ahimsā*), non-lying (i.e. truth), non-stealing and non-possession.

The dates of Mahāvīra's birth and death are uncertain; according to some authorities he died in 528 B.C., while some Indologists place his death as late as in 468 B.C. He was born in Vaisali in North Bihar. He belonged to a well-known Kshatriya clan and was related to the Lichchhavi ruling family of Vaisali. He lived the life of an ordinary householder till his thirtieth year. He then became an ascetic, and for twelve years he wandered about at various places, continuously practising the utmost self-torture. At the age of forty-two he attained supreme knowledge (*Kaivalya*) and became known as *Jina* (conqueror of passions) or *Nirgrantha* (free from worldly fetters). From these terms are derived the names of his followers—*Jainas* or *Nirgranthas*. The

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remaining thirty years of his life were spent in preaching his doctrine in Magadha, Anga, Mithila and Kosala. He died at Pāvā (Patna district, Bihar).

Jaina Doctrines

The Jainas rejected the authority of the Vedas and the practice of animal sacrifice. Their devotion to the doctrine of *ahimsā* was far more strict than that of the Buddhists. They believed that every object possessed a soul (*jīva*) which was endowed with consciousness. They rejected the conception of the creation of the world by a Supreme Power, and according to them, "God is only the highest, noblest and fullest manifestation of the powers which lie latent in the soul of man." They accepted the Hindu theory of *Karma*. Salvation meant complete deliverance from all *Karma* inherited from past lives, and it could be attained only through the so-called 'three jewels' (*Trivarga*): right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. They laid great stress on asceticism under the impression that the soul was strengthened by penances and self-torture.

Tirthankaras and Other Divinities

The Jainas imagine time as an eternally revolving wheel. Its upward course, *Utsarpini*, is under the influence of a good serpent, while its downward course, *Avasarpini*, is under the influence of an evil one. Each *Utsarpini* and *Avasarpini* produce twenty-four Tirthankaras, one of which was Mahāvīra.

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Tirthankaras cannot intercede on behalf of the faithful, for there is no ultimate god; they are important for men as objects of meditation. The world is at present near the end of an *Avasarpini.* Many Tirthankaras have some connection with the Hindu mythology. For instance, first, Pishabadeva attained Nirvāna on Mount Kailāsa, the abode of Śiva. The seventh, Chandraprabha, was born after his mother drank the moon; the eleventh was born of parents who were both called Vishṇu, and he attained Nirvāna on Mount Kailāsa. The twenty-second, Neminātha, was born in Dwāraka and was a cousin of Krishṇa. Other minor Tirthankaras are twelve Chakravartins, nine Nārāyanas or Vāsudevas, nine Pratinārāyanas or Prativāsudevas, nine Balabhadras and, below them, nine Nāradas, eleven Rudras and twenty-four Kāmadevas. Jain gods and demons are of Hindu origin; but there is one important difference—while demons can eventually work out their salvation, gods exist on a different plane and cannot attain liberation without first becoming human being.

Buddhism

Gautama, the illustrious founder of Buddhism, was a contemporary of Mahāvīra. According to some Indologists he attained *Parinirvāna* in *c.* 484 B.C., while others prefer 543 B.C. Like Mahāvīra, he was also a Kshatriya. His father, Suddhodana, was the chief of the Śākya clan, and lived at Kapilavāstu.

Gautama was born in the Lumbini garden (modern Rumminidei in Nepal). At an early age he married Gopā (or Yaśodharā) and a son named Rāhul was

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born to him, when he was twenty-nine years of age. His mind had already been infected by the prevailing spiritual unrest, and he embraced asceticism in quest of salvation. For some time he studied the technique of meditation and Upanishads from Ālāra Kālāma. Then he went to Uruvilva (near Bodh-Gaya) and practised the severest austerities; deep concentration and profound meditation at last led to the discovery of the ultimate truth. Gautama became Buddha (the Enlightened One). He first 'turned the wheel of the Law' and set it in motion in the Deer Park at Sāranāth. Here he was able to secure five disciples. Afterwards he preached his doctrine and gathered many disciples all over India. He passed away at the age of eighty at Kusinagar (at Kasia in Gorakhpur district).

The Buddha was a practical reformer. His primary aim was to secure deliverance from the grim reality of sorrow and suffering. From the *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutta-Pitaka*, includes *Digha-Nikāya*, *Majjhima-Nikāya*, *Samyutta-Nikāya*, *Anguttara-Nikāya*, *Khuddaka-Nikāya—Dharmapada*, *Sutta-Nipata*, *Jātaka*, *Apadana*, *Abhidhamma Pitaka—Dhammasangani*, *Vibhanga*, *Patthana* of *Theravadins* (in Pali) and *Mahavastu* and *Lalitavistara* of *Mahasanghikas* (in Sanskrit), we have the idea of his life and teachings. The essence of the doctrine has been laid down in the four Holy Truths (the *Dharma*) which the Buddha first preached at Banaras immediately after his enlightenment. "(1) What then is the Holy Truth of Ill? Birth is ill, decay is ill, sickness is ill, death is ill. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also that means suffering. In

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short, all grasping at (any of) the five *skandhas* (involves) suffering. (2) What then is the Holy Truth of the Origination of Ill? It is that craving which leads to rebirth, accompanied by delight and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there, i.e., craving for sensuous experience, craving to perpetuate oneself, craving for extinction. (3) What then is the Holy Truth of the Stopping of Ill? It is the complete stopping of that craving, the withdrawal from it, the renouncing of it, throwing it back, liberation from it, non-attachment to it. (4) What then is the Holy Truth of the steps which lead to the Stopping of Ill? It is this holy eight-fold Path, which consists of: right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. Systematic meditation on the four Holy Truths, as on the basic facts of life, is a central task of the Buddhist life."[1] This is the 'Great Middle Path', for it avoids the extremes of gross luxury and severe austerity. This 'Middle Path' leads finally to *Nirvāna*, which implies not only the extinction of desire but also the attainment of a perfect state of tranquillity. Emphasis is laid on the observance of the *Silas* (or moral virtues, e.g., giving up of viling, falsehood, luxury, etc.), *Samādhi* (concentration) and *Prajñā* (insight). The Buddha's simple faith was, thus, meant for all, irrespective of sex, age or social position. He also introduced the practice of holding religious discourses in the language of the common people, and refused to confine spiritual teaching to the Sanskrit language, the language of the learned few.

5540

The monks are the Buddhist elite. They are the only Buddhists in the proper sense of the word. The

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life of a householder is almost incompatible with the higher levels of the spiritual life. This has been a conviction common to all Buddhists at all times. They differed only in the strictness in which they adhered to it.

Monastic life was regulated by the rules of the *Vinaya*; and the discipline was codified in the *Pratimaksha* rules. And poverty, celibacy and inoffensiveness were the three essentials of monastic life. A monk possessed almost no private property at all. He was allowed to have his robes, an alms bowl, a needle, a rosary, a razor with which to shave the head every fortnight, and a filter which served to remove tiny live beings from his drinking water. He should have no home or a permanent shelter, for the life of a monk is described as the homeless life, and in order to enter upon it he must leave home, filled with faith. But the *Vinaya* speaks of the dwelling in convents, sanctuaries, temples, houses and grottos and food should be obtained by begging. On their begging rounds the monks often met with humiliating experiences. The practice of begging thus gives ample opportunities to watch well over the body, control the senses, and to repress thoughts. The monk must go from house to house without making a distinction between those of the poor and those of the wealthy. He must pay no attention to what he gets, and must be neither pleased nor displeased. If a woman hands him his food he must not speak to her, or look at her or observe her beauty or ugliness. Moreover, celibacy was another cornerstone of the monastic life. The monk was warned to be perpetually on his guard, and a short dialogue admirably sums up the attitude of the early Buddhists. Ananda: 'How should we behave

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to women?' Lord: 'Not see them!' Ananda: 'And if we have to see them?' Lord: 'Not speak to them!' Ananda: 'And if we have to speak to them?' Lord: 'Keep your thoughts tightly controlled!'[2]

We also admit that the Buddhist Saṅgha is the oldest religious organization of mankind. It has survived longer than any other institution, except the kindred sect of the Jainas. There were big bullying empires of history, guarded by hosts of soldiers, ships and magistrates. Scarcely one of them lasted longer than perhaps three centuries. On the other hand, here was a movement of deliberate beggars, who always prized poverty more than wealth; who were sworn not to harm or kill other beings; who spent their time in dreaming superb dreams, and inventing beautiful newer-newer-lands; who despised whatever the world valued; who valued whatever the world despises—meekness, generosity, idle contemplation. And yet, these mighty empires, built on greed, hatred and delusion, lasted just a few centuries, while the impulse of self-denial carried the Buddhist Community through more than 2,500 years.

Buddhist Pantheon in Art

Just as the teaching of Buddhism is a development of Upanishadic philosophy, so the mythology and pantheon which grew up about Buddhism drew upon the traditions of the land in which the doctrine was first taught. It sought both to prove the historic Buddha's divine origin and set him in the pattern of previous incarnations familiar to Indian believers and interesting enough to compete with the existing

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Hindu pantheon adding further to the complexity of the Early Indian mythology.

Thus, gradually much of the Hindu pantheon has also been adopted to meet the needs of popular Buddhism, though the gods' functions are generally quite different and all are profusely exhibited in Indian art throughout the Hindu period. Indra (Sakra) is still king of the gods. Yama, called Dharmarāja, presides over the nether world. But Śiva and Pārvatī, generally called Mahākāla and Mahākāli, are reduced to being Buddha's doorkeepers, while Kubera, called Jāmbhala, is his bodyguard. Even many of the Buddhist pantheon are reminiscent of the Śiva-Śakti cults, though in their cruel aspects they often outdo Durgā and Kāli. The most revered of these goddesses is Tārā, who is yellow, red or blue when she threatens and white or green when gentle and loving. Other terrifying goddesses are Kurukulla and Cunda who appear to bear either arms or symbols of divine charity. Hariti, Kubera's wife, suckles five hundred demons and her principal feature is her inexhaustible fecundity. Ushās, the goddess of dawn, has a third eye in her forehead like Śiva, three hideous faces and ten threatening arms. Gentler goddesses are Sarasvatī, goddess of teaching, and the chief goddess, Prajñā, goddess of knowledge. One, Yamantaka, accompanies Manjuśrī, the consort of Sarasvatī, and like Śiva wears a necklace of skulls, has several heads and many arms. Another, Tailokyavijaya, has four heads and four menacing arms and tramples Śiva underfoot. Their iconographic features can be studied from numerous sculptures of the Pāla-Sena period found in northern India.

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Bhakti Movement

The great religious movement, which gradually spread over the whole of India and exercised a powerful influence on spiritual and social life during the medieval period, had its origin in the south. Its beginning may be traced to the work of the celebrated philosopher-reformer, Śaṅkarāchārya, whose greatest achievement was the extermination of decadent Buddhism and the consequent revival of Hinduism. He established a logical monistic system, but his emphasis on the path of knowledge, so congenial to the learned Brāhmins, failed to evoke a hearty response from the common people. It was felt that the best way to attract the popular mind towards Hinduism was to interpret it in terms understood by the masses. The necessity of making Hinduism a living, active force in the life of the common people was gradually becoming stronger and stronger, for Islam had already thrown a powerful challenge to the guardians of Hindu society in India.

The Bhakti cult provided the much needed relief, and it was brought into prominence by the great Vaishṇava teacher Rāmānuja, who died in 1137. Rāmānanda, a disciple of the Rāmānuja school, was 'the bridge between the Bhakti movement of the South and the North'. The simplification of worship and the liberalisation of the traditional caste rules were Rāmānanda's most important contributions to the solution of the religious problems of his age. It has been thus argued that these novelties were due to the influence of Islam. His teaching served as a step towards bridging the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. But the Muslims did not accept

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the Rāma-Sītā creed. His only known Muslim disciple was Kabir; and according to one tradition, Kabir was not a Muslim by birth. Hinduism gradually engulfed the liberal movement initiated by Rāmānanda.

The most fruitful aspect of Rāmānanda's work is to be found in the teaching of Kabir; he was perhaps the most cosmopolitan reformer in medieval India. He lived in the fifteenth century. Macauliffe says, "Kabir has written works which all religious denominations can accept, and which, if perused without bigotry, are advantageous for the salvation of all persons. Kabir was so steadfast in his utterance of God's name, that in comparison with it he deemed worthless the rules of caste and the Hindu and Muhammadan religious observances. At Banaras he lived the unconventional life of a simple householder, and in spite of the mysticism which is so remarkable a feature of his verses, he was a practical reformer. He was the first leader of the medieval religious movement to make a conscious effort for Hindu-Muslim unity in the sphere of religion." He regrets: "Hindus call upon Rāma, the Muslims on Rahim, yet both fight and kill each other, and none knows the truth."

In the fifteenth century religious and social life in Bengal was stagnant. "The rules of caste became more and more stringent... the gap between man and man was widened by caste restrictions. The lower strata of society groaned under the autocracy of the higher, who shut the portals of learning against the inferior classes ... the religion of the new school (*Paurānik*) became the monopoly of the Brāhmins ..." A natural reaction against this system was embodied in the

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Vaishṇavism preached by Śrī-Chaitanya. He was born in 1485 and died in 1533. This great teacher raised his voice against the rituals considered essential by the Brāhmins and declared that true worship consisted of love and devotion only. He did not observe caste restrictions in accepting disciples; even Muslims were admitted to the new religious fraternity organised under his influence. Vaishṇavism, thus, opened a new life of spirituality and knowledge to the lower castes and new challenge to the caste-ridden society.

Profile of Indian Art

Like India herself Indian Art is of great antiquity and one cannot but marvel at the height reached by Indian artists during the Classical Age. Extraordinary stories about India were chronicled four hundred years before the birth of Christ by a Greek physician named Ctesias of Cnidus and these stories were current in the Persian Court. It is, therefore, no wonder that when Alexander the Great's Macedonian troops crossed the boundaries of India and entered the Punjab, they were amazed by what they saw before them. These soldiers were no uncultured barbarians and had traversed hundreds of miles before entering India. But as they stepped into the well-laid streets of Taxila, they suddenly felt themselves transported to another world. Two millenniums have passed since then but a traveller unacquainted with Indian life and culture still feels the same shock of surprise when he lands at Bombay, the biggest commercial and cultural mart of India. Ascetics with strange marks on their foreheads with their naked

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bodies smeared with ashes, charmers with their snakes coiled round the body, shouting processions, crowds in religious ecstasy, the childish and grandiose images that obsess the sight, all these bear witness to a different way of life. Imposing temple towers and images of divinities which reflect an art that developed and enriched itself during each succeeding age stand witness to a unique civilization. Europe and the Near East have also their saints and shrines, pilgrimages and pilgrims, festivals and ceremonies ordained by religion, but in India religion is the framework of daily life. In India humanity is steeped in divinity, and by whatever name a man worships God, he sees God, hears God, is a part of God and lives in God every minute of his life. Even the humblest are not cut off, and the hymns which rise from the rice-fields are not as dignified and as moving as the poets' psalms. But racially India is the most mixed country in the world and all shades of skin colour, from pure white to jet black, are to be found among her five to six hundred million inhabitants. Physically, the ice-capped mountains stand undaunted, the sand of the Thar desert burns under a blazing sun and innumerable streams water the great plains of India. Crops too are as varied as the land itself. The torrential rain helps cultivation and farming but sometimes leaves major disasters in its train. The Indian philosopher therefore knows that God and Nature are one, acting by necessity and according to invariable law.

The great Himalayan ranges, although a natural barrier, were at no time an insuperable one and invaders coming from the common stock from which Europe received the Greeks, the Latins, the Celts, the Germanic peoples and the Slavs passed Trans-

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Caspian Asia leaving the germs of the Iranian peoples on their way and eventually crossed the Indus. The Vedic gods were primarily connected with the elements of nature. The god of the thunderbolt, of fire, of the moon and sun among others were simple personifications of aspects of Nature. Ritualistic conceptions and speculations were, however, already present. The collection of hymns constituting the four great Vedas were composed during *c.* 1500 to 1000 B.C. Till the beginning of the fag-end of the last century the history of Pre-Aryan India was enveloped in darkness. Since 1921 systematic excavations at Mohenjodāro in Sind and at Harappā in the Punjab and later on at many places in Afghanistan, Sind, Punjab and Gujarat revealed the presence of a well-developed civilization. Although in the Vedas there is no mention of this civilization the discovery of archaeological remains tells us that it was rich in works of art. The artifacts unearthed at the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization as it is known today prove that the Indus people had obvious connection with the Elamite and Sumerian Culture. Sir John Marshall saw in the imagery of Mohenjodāro the early features of the Hindu pantheon, the great god Paśupati and others.

Pre-historic India also knew the religion of the magalithic period and dolemens, menhirs and cromdechs are found everywhere in the peninsula. Vedic worship which was complicated and elaborate was performed by individuals and not by the people as a body. Hence, religious movements to cater for community worship did not, so far as we know, exist during the Vedic period. A religious revolution was necessary to break the barrier of priestly domination.

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This revolution was brought about by the preachings of the Buddha and Mahāvīra who represented a negation of the authority of the priestly class. Religion was no longer the stronghold of the rich and the influential. Free from the old liturgical and ritualistic fetters it had reached the humblest of the humble.

Mahāvīra founded an ascetic brotherhood having *Ahimsā* or non-violence as its fundamental doctrine. The gospel preached by Mahāvīra reflects the idea of a supreme god but admits a pantheon consisting of many petty deities who are apparently better off than men but are subject to the same vicissitudes that befall men. It is only the chosen saints who attain supreme liberation. The religion that evolved out of this came to be known as Jainism, because one of the titles of Mahāvīra was 'The Victorious' (in Sanskrit *Jina*). Jainism still survives in India and its adherents come mainly from the merchant class, the *banias*. The ancient Jaina centres are still maintained in Gujarat, Bengal and the Deccan. Splendid Jain temples with beautiful sculptures and floral works stand even today at Mathura, Girnar, Palitana and Mount Abu. Jain architecture is rich and full of calm vitality. While the religion preaches asceticism and self-denial, the temples embody delicate and careful work with a fine sense of proportion. The quality of animation is however lacking in Jain sculpture and architecture.

Buddhist sculptures, on the other hand, capture the lyrical impulse and animation capable of transfiguring stone. Siddhārtha, a contemporary of Mahāvīra, found in the law of causality the origin, nature and cure of the suffering inevitable with living beings. The teachings of Buddha suffused with

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sympathy for the common suffering man drew large audiences and the common people adored their Master, the apostles and the saints and an infinite multiplication of Buddha.

After Buddha's demise the places consecrated by his presence were worshipped. His relics too were worshipped by placing the Wheel of Law and the Umbrella of Sovereignty on mounds of earth and stones. The mound was encircled by a railing. Initially caves and grottos gave shelter to the monks (*bhikshus*) but gradually these were replaced by rest-houses which developed into monasteries. Caves, nevertheless, remained a traditional habitat of monks, a symbol not only of the religion but also of the fine art that took shape in them. Karle, Kanheri, Ajanta, Ellora and others stand as fine examples of this art. A complete Buddhist imagery was elaborated at Gandhara in the north-west. From Gandhara it spread to China and the East Indies. But eventually Buddhism was swept away from its birth place by the Muslim conquest of India; other factors were also responsible for it.

Despite the presence of innumerable cults and an infinite diversity of deities Hinduism preserves in itself the common characteristics that comprise the foundation of the Brahmanical orthodoxy—theoretical recognition of the Vedas, the organisation of society in castes, the supremacy of the Brahmin and respect for the cow. Hinduism has never attempted nor has it ever been able to organise itself into a regular hierarchy with one supreme head. Indeed, a systematised anarchy has always been the strength of Hinduism and an arbitrary assimilation of the gods and goddesses of the primitive and aboriginal

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tribes of India into its pantheon has enabled Śiva, Vishṇu, Durgā and other deities to emerge.

Unlike the cathedrals of the Christians or the mosques of the Muslims, the Hindu temple is no place for collective prayer. It is the dwelling-place of the god and the priest's function is to take care of the needs of the god represented either by an idol or by a symbol. Hindu festivals mostly religious in nature are the occasions of fairs and pilgrimages.

A brief description of the typical Hindu temple might be in order here. The most sacred part of the temple is the ante-chamber where the god dwells. Above this shrine rises a many-storeyed tower from which the style of the whole edifice may be deduced. The three main styles in Indian architecture are the rectangular Nagara in the north, the rounded Vesara seen on the east coast and in the Andhra State, and the octagonal Drāviḍian in the south. Often, pillared pavilions border the front of the central shrine. Drāviḍian temples have massive pyramidal structures over the gateways. The building surface usually has decorations and images sculptured on it. Very often the sculptor finds inspiration from and gives expression to mythological episodes. There are rock-hewn, underground temples also like the Elephantā Caves, near Bombay, the Kailāsnāth temple at Elloṛā and the famous *ratha* at Mahābalipuram. Here, it is significant to note that Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, although practised by a sizable number of people in India, did not give any new inspiration to the Indian architecture. It was iconoclastic Islam that renewed and transformed Indian architecture and painting.

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Traditionalism in Art, Religion and Modern India

The will to participate in the common tradition is a unifying factor in modern India. As an expression of this will the Indian people undertake pilgrimages to sacred places and celebrate a large number of festivals throughout the year. These are moments of national joy.

Apart from Holi the most widely celebrated festival is the *Diwālī*, 'the string of lights'. The celebration lasts for one to three days coinciding with the end of the harvesting season and marking the beginning of a new season for '*Rabi-Śashya*' (Sun-bathed crops). Houses are white-washed and decorated with stars made of transparent paper of bright colours. Oil lamps and candles are lit and placed on balconies and on the front door-steps of the houses. At Varanasi, the sacred city, lamps burn along the bank of the Ganges and the reflection of the dancing flames on the water creates an enchanting view of celestial beauty. Thousands of shops and stalls along the streets of cities stand decorated with luminous garlands and the light thrown from oil or acetylene lamps lights up the streets. The festival of light lights up the lives of the people who put on their best clothes. The Diwālī sweets are distributed and the streets throng with people. Gaiety, of course, never makes the people forget the temples, for an undertone of religion is always there in almost all Indian festivals. Lakshmī and Ganesha, the patrons of wealth, are paid especial homage.

Similarly, the Dussehra festival is celebrated over major parts of India. It commemorates the victory of Rāma over the demon Rāvaṇa, the triumph of

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good over evil. Our penchant for processions and demonstrations is a well known fact. The multitude of flags lend this fair a special appearance: it is regarded as a sacred and beneficial act to carry the heavy, richly decorated palanquin where Raghunāthjī resides during the festivities. And the joyous crowd mills around it protected by the richly decorated priest—a moving proof of the extraordinary popularity the Rāmāyaṇa Epic has enjoyed for centuries, and the pleasure it gives to the millions of people for whom the purity of Rāma and Sītā has become the symbol of an ideal conjugal life.

India's teeming millions live in the villages and their contribution to our culture is a fact of great importance. One goes through the crowded villages of mud-wall shanties, on which the cow-dung cake dries, making it combustible. Often, in the peace of the evening, one hears a song psalmodizing a monotonous prayer accompanied by a *vina*. Or else the village bard, the very one who knows by heart the genealogical tree of the prominent local people, organizes a racital of scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa which lasts well into the night. One might also obtain permission to attend a wedding, always invested with great dignity, for the villagers who, though often so poor, consent to spend a lot for the festivities and even more to assure their daughters a dowry of money or jewels or of both. They sometimes go into debt for long years to pitiless moneylenders, but find consolation in a few hours of escape from their miserable lot in life.

Thus the Indian religion is interlaced with philosophical speculation and is an essential part of the social life of the country. This social life has as its

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twin pillars the caste system and the function of *Dharma.* The term *Dharma* may be taken to mean, with sufficient justification, the whole bundle of laws that formed the basis of social, political and religious order, which, it was the paramount duty of the king to obey in the conduct of his relations. If any long-standing usage or custom was infringed it would be an act of *Adharma* and its effect would be disastrous. The entire polity stood on the support yielded by the recognition of, and acquiescence in, current laws or customs, and the king was primarily responsible for their maintenance. A king properly discharging his functions would be regarded as acting in accordance with *Dharma.* In the *Chetiya Jātaka*[3] which seems to contain some historical facts, a king brought about his own destruction by transferring a right enjoyed by a particular line of priests to a new assignee, which was supposed to be an act in violation of the sanctity of an established practice. Thus, we see that the king's obligation to *Dharma* put a curb on an arbitrary use of his powers. He was not allowed to make a capricious innovation that would go against *Dharma.*[4]

Again, the word *Dharma* has also been used to connote religion as well as law in its wider sense. In other words law here is essentially the moral law or the order that prevails over and guides the course of life. The religion of the Hindus, therefore, encompasses every aspect of life. It is further explained by Aśoka, the Great Maurya Emperor, in his numerous edicts. In a word his *Dharma* implies virtually the ethical aspect of all religions including Buddhism. Certainly Aśoka did not wish all his subjects to become monks, but he wanted them certainly to

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become good citizens. The *Dharma* of Asoka constituted a code of moral principles which is the fundamental heritage of all religions. He was not opposed to Devas and Brahmanas, but he wanted to put an end to the practices which violated all codes of morality. It was rather a plea for the social responsibility and of good behaviour of one man to another and a plea for the recognition of the dignity of man and a harmony in human society. He also laid special emphasis on the principle of toleration and non-violence. Toleration, again, implied the toleration of both man and his ideas.

As for the vast pantheon of gods, Indian caste system and *Dharma* provide only a mythological support. Here complete renunciation has always been the key to the attainment of the Absolute. India is the land of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Epics, of a whole treasury of moral and social maxims which exist without interruption from the Buddhistic *suttas* to the '*Kathamrita*' of Sri-Ramkrishna. Penance and self-denial are part of the ideal Hindu way of life. The deep rooted idea of self-mortification, of '*tapas*' (meditation) is inherent in Indian behaviour. Dominance over the natural and baser instincts of human beings and the most severe self-discipline have always been applauded by the Indian spiritualists. These traditional ideas have been echoed by Mahatma Gandhi many times in modern India. *Ahimsa* (non-violence), Gandhiji's weapon, is not so much non-violence as action founded on a refusal to harm and in its positive aspect it is the concept of universal brotherhood and non-injury to animals. And our famous religious teacher, Swami Vivekananda, rightly says, where do you seek God, ignoring

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His so many manifestations, before you? He, who loves all living beings, is indeed serving God.

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CHAPTER II

CULTURE OF THE MAURYAS, KUSHĀṆAS AND GUPTAS

The Mauryas

THE establishment of the Maurya empire is an important event in the history of the Indian sub-continent and the founder of that empire occupies a unique place in history. Its founder Chandragupta destroyed Alexander's work in India by liberating the north-western region from the foreign yoke. He extended the political frontier of India to the borders of Persia at the cost of the Greeks and yet secured their friendship which endured for three generations. For the first time in ancient India, within the geographical boundaries of India he created the largest empire so far known to its people and realised the ideal of unity which had been their dream since Vedic times. Chandragupta supplemented conquest by administrative integration. He created a political system which was sustained by a powerful army, an active

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bureaucracy and a vigilant intelligence system. Yet it was far from a ruthless autocracy based on force. The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya prescribes the king's goal: 'In the happiness of his subjects his happiness, in their welfare his welfare. Whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good.' This seems to have been the spirit which inspired Chandragupta's administration. He initiated the tradition which reached its maturity in the days of Aśoka. As we study from his edicts, he did not regard himself as the Great Elect in his relations with his subjects, but rather as a father-figure. Aśoka constantly stresses the father-child relationship between the king and his subjects. The First Separate Edict, Dhauli records, '... *sarve munisse pajā mamā. athā pajāye icchāmi hakaṃ kiṃti sarvena hitasukhena hidalokikapālalokikena yūjjevū ti tathā ... munissesu pi icchāmi hakaṃ* ...'[1] ('All men are my children, and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness, both in this world and the next, so do I desire (the same) for all men.') This paternal attitude is a new feature in his relationship with his subjects and the New Monarch is now to be regarded as the paternal benefactor and not as a servant of the state. Not only that in his Sixth Major Rock Edict, 'the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi: In the past the quick dispatch of business and the receipt of reports did not take place at all times. But I have now arranged it thus. At all times, whether I am eating, or am in the women's apartments, or in my inner apartments, or at the cattle-shed, or in my carriage, or in my gardens—wherever I may be, my informants should keep me in touch with public

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business. Thus, everywhere I transact public business. And whatever I may order by word of mouth, whether it concerns a donation or a proclamation, or whatever urgent matter is entrusted to my officers, if there is any dispute or deliberation about it in the Council, it is to be reported to me immediately, at all places and at all times.

'This I have commanded. In hard work and the dispatch of business alone, I find no satisfaction. For I consider that I must promote the welfare of the whole world, and hard work and the dispatch of business are the means of doing so. Indeed there is no better work than promoting the welfare of the whole world. And whatever may be my good deeds, I have done them in order to discharge my debt to all beings. I work for their happiness in this life, that in the next they may gain heaven. For this purpose has this inscription of *Dhamma* been engraved. May it endure long. May my sons, grandsons, and great grandsons strive for the welfare of the whole world. But this is difficult without great effort.'[2]

'Whatever may have been the personal weaknesses of Aśoka which were made manifest during his later years, our admiration for him is great, when we consider the courage with which he attempted to expound and impose *Dhamma*, particularly in the complex cultural milieu of the third century B.C. Religious texts of the time stressed man's responsibility to his religion and to his ancestors. To these Aśoka added yet another responsibility, perhaps the most important, that of responsibility of one's fellow human beings as he expresses it in the Sixth Rock Edict. Aśoka's humanism lay not in his insistence on non-violence, on responsible social behaviour, and in

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his understanding of human limitations, when in his earlier edicts he preached moderation in action. It is apparent on reading the edicts that he constantly stressed the dignity of man. The divine certainly appears and the gods come down to earth and mix with man, but on a human level.'[3]

H.G. Wells rightly points out, 'For eight-and-twenty years Aśoka worked sanely for the real needs of men. Amidst the tens of thousands of name of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Aśoka shines and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan his name is still honoured. China, Tibet and even India, though it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness. More living men cherish his memory today than have ever heard the names of Constantine or Charlemagne.'[4]

The Kushāṇas

About 78 A.D. the Kushāṇas, a horde of Central Asian tribes, overthrew the Indo-Parthian empire and established themselves "as lords of an empire extending from Lake Aral to China and most of Northern and Central India". Their first princes, Kujala Kadphises I and Vima Kadphises II, had been rather "uncouth barbarians". But in the second century, under Kaṇishka, the Great, and his successors, Huvishka and Vāsudeva, the Kushāṇa empire become a first-rank political and cultural power.

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General Prosperity

The empire of the Kushāṇas proved a great civilizing factor and opened the way for Indian civilization to Central and Eastern Asia. Trade and commerce flowed through India, Persia, Mesopotamia, China and the Roman Empire. The Kushāṇa ambassadors were despatched to the great Roman Emperors. The sea-borne trade of India was carried, under the Kushāṇas, through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Indian goods were carried through these two channels to Egypt and the Roman Empire. Indian silk pieces, pearls and other articles of eastern luxury were in great demand by the Roman nobility. In payment of these articles, quantities of Roman gold coins poured into India so much so that a Roman writer, Pliny, in a patriotic vein lamented the flow of gold from his country to India.

As all the great trade routes (silks, gold and spices) of Asia, from China and India to Iran and Rome, passed through the Kushāṇa territories, the commercial towns grew rich and quickly recovered from all political crises. Though the local culture in Khorezm (Khewa), Sogdia and Bactria was Iranian, in Afghanistan predominantly Hellenistic and in the Indian, a cultural mixture was unavoidable and proved highly fruitful.

Their Coins

The Kushāṇa coins best mirror this synchronism. They were generally modelled on those of the Roman Empire, retaining, however, Indo-Greek, Greco-

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Bactrian and Parthian motifs, and evolving new Zoroastrian and Indian features. On the obverse side, the head, bust or whole figure of the emperor is represented, standing, or sitting with crossed legs on a couch, in thick riding boots, wide, sagging trousers, a long stiff overcoat, with a pointed Scythian cap or mitre on his head, armed with spear, mace or bow or holding a sceptre. A halo surrounds his head, and flames issue from his shoulders; for the emperors were regarded as *daivaputras* (sons of the gods). But on the reverse side a pantheon of Greek, Iranian and Indian gods appears in amazing confusion. There are still a few Greek names and figures—Zeus, Heracles, Helios, Hephaistos, Sarapis, Selene; but their very selection proves that they stand for indigenous deities. The Indian gods are not numerous—Buddha, Skanda and Śiva.

Religion

(*a*) *Buddhism*

The Kushāṇas made a very valued contribution in the domain of Buddhism; and Buddhism was raised to the status of a world religion during their reign. In the Buddhist Church there was no central coordinating authority: as a result no less than 18 different sects had grown up by the time of Kaṇishka. At the advice of Pārśva (or Pārśvika) Kaṇishka had convoked a great Buddhist Council in Kashmir (or Gandhāra). The Buddhist Church was divided into two big camps, viz. Hinayāna and Mahāyāna; the former was the original Buddhism and the latter was the new school of Buddhism.

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According to Hinayāna, a man himself had to strive for his salvation and must make himself holy. He should neither pray to God or gods, nor depend upon Him for deliverance from sin, nor offer prayers to Lord Buddha. But the new creed Mahāyāna elevated Buddha from his position of a teacher to that of God or the king of gods. Buddhism, thus, under the Kushāṇas became theistic. The images of the Buddha were made and placed in monasteries, temples, and prayers for salvation and forgiveness of sins were offered to him by the people. In addition to Lord Buddha, worship and prayers were also offered to Bodhisattvas, the holy saints who were in the process of obtaining Buddhahood. Thus, the images of the Bodhisattvas with those of Buddha were also made and worshipped. On the other hand, the Hinayāna school instead of making images of the Buddha, represented him only by symbols, e.g., an empty seat or a pair of foot-prints. Moreover, the doctrine of Bodhisattvas led to a new belief that anyone might aim at or rise to the Buddhahood for assisting men in obtaining salvation. On the contrary, Hinayāna mentions that each has to strive for his or her salvation without the assistance of a God or saint. Thus, the Mahāyānist believed in the divinity of the Buddha, in the efficacy of prayer, faith and devotion to a personal saviour. It began to follow the Hindu idea of Yoga, the practice of which was supposed to lead to spiritual insight. The exposition and preaching of the Hindu doctrine of Bhakti (or devotion) had some effect on the new form of Buddhism. The Bhakti cult imposed upon its followers single-minded devotion and intense attachment to the object of their worship and inspired

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the devotees with the feelings of warmth and emotion. All these were absent in the orthodox Buddhism. Hinayānism was unprogressive, cold, intellectually inert and rather monotonous. In short, Mahāyānism was an intensely living and active faith and infused new life in the old Buddhism. Thus, in the Kushāṇa Age, Buddhism, under its new form, spread rapidly to many countries, such as Burma, Siam, Malay Peninsula, China, Japan, etc.

(*b*) *Other Forms of Religion*

From the study of their coins it can also be suggested that they worshipped Greek, Sumerian, Elamite, Persian and Indian deities. Among them mention may be made of Aesho (Śiva), Sakaymo Boddo (Śākyamuni Buddha), the wind-god Oads (Persian Vādo; Indian Vāta), the fire-god Athsho (Persian Atash), the moon-god Mao, the sun-god Meiro or Miuro (or Mioro) (Persian Mithra, Mihr; Indian Mitra or Mihira), Sumerian mother goddess Nana, Nanaia or Nana-Shao (Bibi Nānī of Baluchistan and Nainā Devī of the Kulu Valley), the war-god Orlango (Persian Bahram), the fire-god Pharro (Persian Farr), the sun-god Helios (Greek), Roma, the goddess of abundance Ardoksho, Indian gods Ooshna (Vishṇu), Mahāsena, Skanda, Kumāra, Viśākha and Lakshmī. Among the above gods and goddesses Kaṇishka's coins contain large number of Greek, Zoroastrian, Elamite and Hindu gods. Images of the Buddha also appear on some of them. It might be the fact that like Akbar, the great Mughal, Kaṇishka followed a policy of "Sulhi-Kul" (tolera-

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tion of all sects) and tried to win the sympathy and support of all denominations for the sake of his vast empire. Probably he adopted Buddhism late in life, for his Peshawar casket inscription of his late period records him as a Buddhist.

The Gandhāra School of Art

The art of Gandhāra is, properly speaking, the official art of the Kushāṇa Emperor Kaṇishka and his successors. The "Gandhāra art" is applied to that school of architecture, sculpture, and painting, which flourished in north-western India from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. This designation comes from the ancient name of the region, and is to be referred to as Greco-Buddhist, i.e., the forms and the styles of Greek art are applied to Buddhist subjects. The earlier Buddhist sculptor disliked idolatory and hence indicated the presence of the Buddha only by such signs as the foot-marks, wheel or umbrella. But the artists of this school adopted the novel method of representing him as a human being and carved full stone images of him surrounded by the Bodhisattvas. These images resemble strikingly those of the Greek gods. Thus, "images of the Buddha appear in the likeness of Apollo, the Yaksha; Kuvera is posed in the fashion of the Phidian Zeus, so on". As a matter of fact the Gandhāra sculptures are lively artistic expressions of the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism which regards the Buddha as a god attended by a hierarchy of other beings "acting as mediators between him and sinful men". Outside India Gandhāra art became the parent art of Eastern Turkistan,

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Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan. Kaṇishka also built many Buddhist *stupas* and *vihāras*; and in Kashmir he also founded a city called Kaṇishkapura.

Intellectual and Literary Activities

The Kushāṇa period is very important from the literary and intellectual point of view. Among the Kushāṇas, Kaṇishka was a liberal patron of art and learning. Celebrated scholars like Parsava, Vasumitra, Aśvaghosha, Charaka, and Nāgārjuna adorned his court. Most famous among them was Aśvaghosha. In the opinion of Prof. S. Levi, "he stands at the starting point of all the great currents that renewed and transformed India towards the beginning of the Christian era. Poet, musician, preacher, moralist, philosopher, playwright, tale-teller, he is an inventor in all these arts, and excels in all; in his richness and variety he recalls Milton, Goethe, Kant and Voltaire." His *Buddhacharita* and *Sutrālaṁkāra* are imperishable testimony to his scholarship and genius.

Next to Aśvaghosha stands Nāgārjuna. He is said to be the author of the *Śatasahasrika-Prajñā Pāramita*, one of the earliest *Mahāyāna-Sutras*. He is also the author of *Madhyamikāsutras* and the founder of the *Mādhyamika school* which teaches that the whole of the phenomenal world is a mere illusion. Vasumitra is the author of *Mahāvidhasha Śāstra* which is an encyclopaedia of Buddhist philosophy. Charaka, the greatest authority on the *Ayurveda* system of medicine and surgery, is said to have been the court physician of Kaṇishka.

It is also interesting to note that the proceedings

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of the great Buddhist Council convoked by Kaṇishka were recorded in Sanskrit. "This introduction of the use of Sanskrit as the *lingua-franca* is a turning point in the mental history of the Indian people. The causes that preceded it, the changes in the intellectual standpoint that went with it, the results that followed on both, are each of them of vital importance", says Dr. Rhys Davids. Thus, the Kushāṇa period witnessed important developments in religion, literature and sculpture, especially the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Gandhāra art, and the appearance of the Buddha figure in art. In the establishment of a vast empire and the revival of imperial tradition, in the extensive intellectual activities, in the cultivation and the rise of distinctive schools of art and in the dissemination and transformation of Buddhism, the Kushāṇa Age occupies an important place in the civilization of ancient India.

But after Vāsudeva the Kushāṇa empire broke up into small principalities. Ultimately the Nāgas supplanted their power in India whereas the Sāssānians ousted them from Bactria and Sisthan. Some of the petty Kushāṇa princes continued to exist in North-Western borderland of the sub-continent. Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty is said to have forced them to acknowledge his suzerainty. They were, however, finally overthrown by the Hūṇas and later on by the Sāhi kings of the Punjab. Again, the political disintegration continued unabated in northern India. But with the rise of the Guptas in the beginning of the fourth century A.D., the picture changed and a new era of peace and progress set in. The early Gupta rulers made extensive conquests, unified the greater part of the sub-continent under their Imperial

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Pl 1 121 Quarter panel from ceiling of ante-chamber, Cave II

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Pl. 2 120 Panel from ceiling of shrine-chamber, Cave II

Pl. 3 F. 9, From wall-painting A, Cave I →

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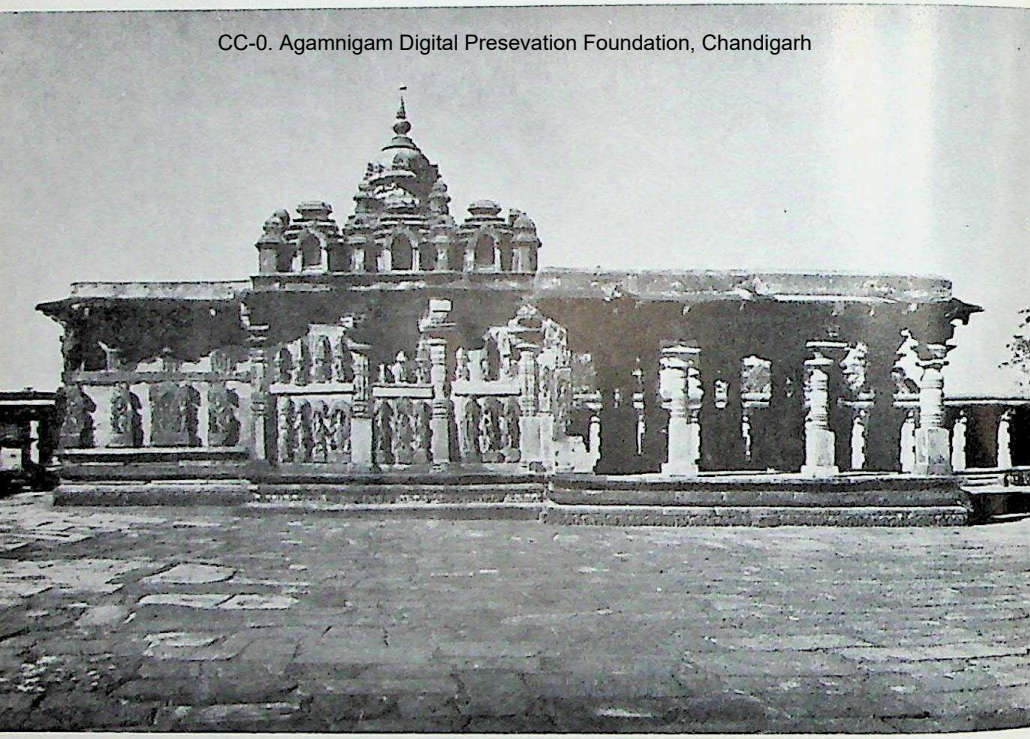

Pl. 4 Belur (Hassan Dist., Mysore) Andal temple, general view from south, c. 12th Cent., Southern Karnata style Soapstone AIIS Neg. No. A14.62

Pl. 5 Patralekhā (Chandella School) (No. 1361, Indian Museum, Calcutta)

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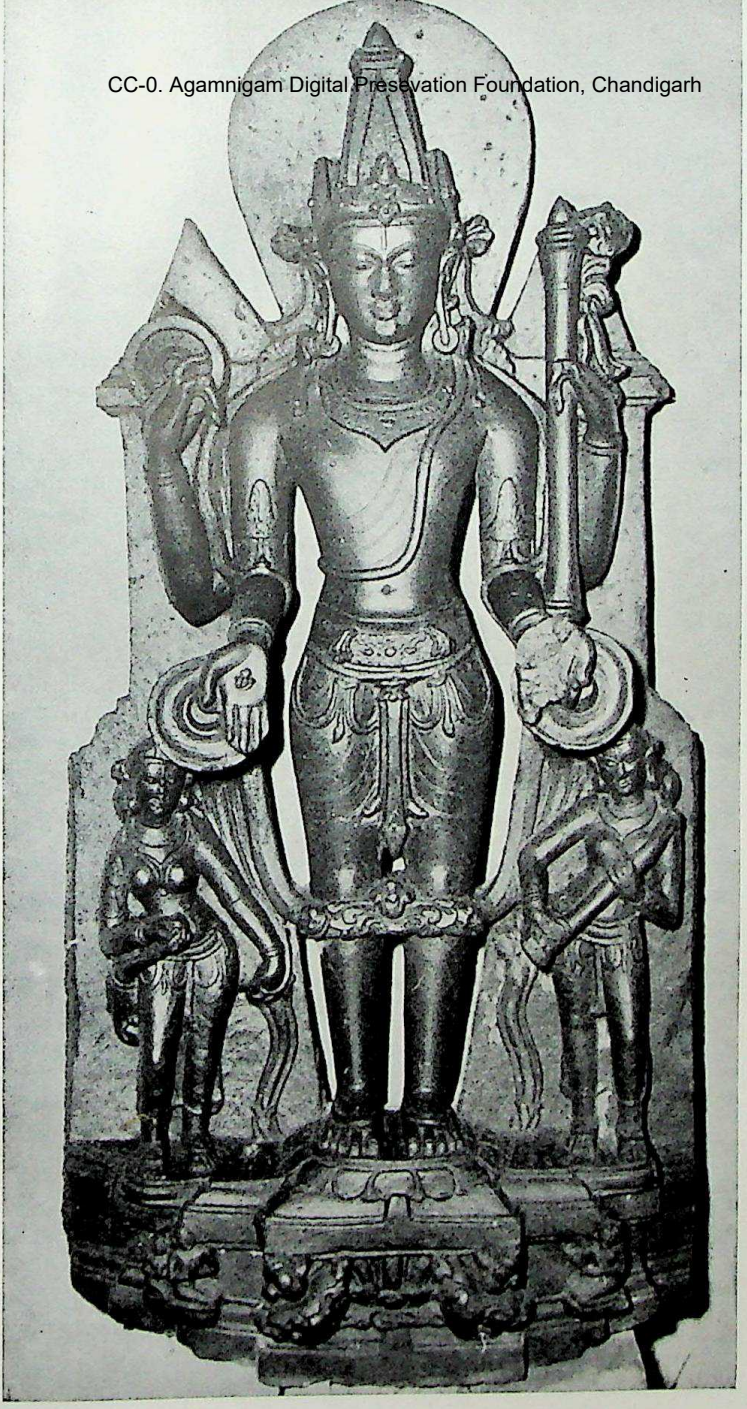

Pl. 7 Vishnu (Pala-Sena School) No. 44, West Bengal Govt. Art Gallery

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Pl. 6 Rishavanatha (Pala-Sena School) No. 24, West Bengal Govt. Art Gallery

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sceptre and embarked the country upon an age of material, moral, intellectual and cultural attainment unrivalled in any age of her ancient history.

The Guptas

Before the rise of the Imperial Guptas, India had developed an advanced system of agriculture, industry and trade. The unification of almost the whole of the Gangetic valley by Chandragupta I and his famous son Samudragupta, and the incorporation of Malwa, Gujrat and Kathiawar by Chandragupta II ensured a strong and well-organised government for the richest and most populous regions of India. The glamour and prestige of this new Imperial power rose so high by the time of Samudragupta as to secure respect for the imperial authority from local rulers up to India's natural frontiers in the East, as well as in the West. He did not attempt to extend his empire south of the Vindhya mountains, but he carried out a successful military raid in the Dakshiṇā-patha (Deccan). Marching through the jungles of Madhya Pradesh he reached the coastal region of Kaliṅga (Orissa) and followed the coast road as far as Nellore in the far south. On his return journey he received submission of the kings through whose territory he passed, together with huge sums in the form of tribute, but made no attempt to annex their lands permanently. So great was the fame of Samudragupta, that the kings of far distant Ceylon, and of the Śakas and the Kushāṇas of the north-west of India, sent embassies to him.

The annexation of western India by Chandra-

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gupta II was not his only achievement. After the premature death of his son-in-law, for about twenty-five years, during the regency of his daughter Prabhāvatīgupta, the Vākāṭaka kingdom came under the political influence of Chandragupta II. He was succeeded by his son, Kumāragupta I (A.D. 415 to 454) who probably preserved the empire of his forefathers intact. But in the last years of the reign of Kumāragupta I his empire suffered a serious blow from the Hūṇas. During the struggle with the Hūṇas he died, and his son, Skandagupta (A.D. 455 to 467), assumed power. He defeated the invaders and was able to establish royal power throughout his empire. But after his death the great days of the Guptas were over. Under the relentless attacks of the Hūṇas and others the grand fabric of the mighty empire gradually crumbled down. Although the successors of Skandagupta continued to rule their small kingdom, mainly confined to Magadha and Bengal, for a few generations, the local governors ruled almost independently in many parts of the Gupta Empire. However, in the heyday of the Guptas the people enjoyed peace and prosperity.

The Gupta state had received its strength and vitality from the continuous rule of more than two centuries by an able set of rulers. They profitably helped the progress of administration at least in the major part of India. They controlled the whole machinery of the government and had the largest share in the formulation of the policy. They wielded very extensive powers, commanded the army, administered justice, issued rescripts and granted remission of taxes. But they were not a despot, for many of the laws of the land had a sacred character, being

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derived from the *Vedas* and *Smritis*, and were to a certain extent independent of the royal control. Besides these, many of the ordinary secular laws were originated from the guilds and corporations and from local laws and customs.

They, however, maintained a hierarchy of administrative set-up through the provincial heads. Provincial governors were directly appointed by them and were responsible to them in administrative matters. Through them the kings also influenced the administration, for the *Vishayapatis* were again appointed by the *Uparikas* (governors). But the whole administrative set-up was hanging on the great personality and valour of the great kings like Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. After their death the vast Gupta empire gradually crumbled down. Unlike the Chinese in the contemporary period they failed to establish adequate administrative set-up permanently in the sub-continent. On the other hand, China under the Hans was able to establish the Mandarin system of government which continued to exist for several thousand years.

II

As regards religion all the imperial rulers starting from Chandragupta I to Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Budhagupta, Vainyagupta and others followed absolutely a tolerant policy towards all forms of religious faith. They then endowed money and lands liberally to them. It is also true that by the time of the Imperial Guptas the formation of society on caste

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basis was finally fixed. A sharp distinction was made between the three higher castes and the Śūdras. The former were twice-born (*Dvija*), once at their natural birth and again at their initiation, when they were invested with the sacred thread. But the Śūdras had no initiation and they had occupied the lowest rank in the ladder. We also notice the great differences in their duties and their social status. "The Brāhmaṇa is to study and teach, to sacrifice, and to give and receive gifts; the Kshatriya must protect the people, sacrifice, and study; the Vaiśya also sacrifices and studies, but his chief function is to breed cattle, to till the earth, to pursue trade and to lend money; the Śūdra's duty is only to serve the three higher classes—and it is better to do one's own duty badly than other's well."[5] Thus, according to *Bhāgavad Gītā*, "for each man there was a place in society and a function to fulfil, with its own duties and rights."[6]

But below the Śūdras there were a lot of the so-called untouchables and outcastes in the society. The chief of these groups was the Chaṇḍālas, a term which can be used loosely for many types of untouchables. They had to live outside the city gates or on the outskirts of the villages. Though some Chaṇḍālas had other means of livelihood, in theory their main task was the carrying and cremation of corpses, and they also served as executioners of criminals. By the Gupta time they became so strictly untouchable that, like lepers in medieval Europe, they were forced to strike a wooden clapper on entering a town, to warn the upper classes for their polluting approach.[7] There were thus many maladies and shortcomings in the social system of the Guptas.

We have the valuable account of Fā-hsien to the

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effect that the people of the Middle Kingdom were 'numerous and happy'. It is clear that certain parts of the kingdom, especially Magadha and its adjoining regions, progressed materially to a greater extent than did other less fortunate regions. And from the literary and cultural point of view, so great was the activity in the field of art, literature and science, that the Gupta age has sometimes been called the Hindu Renaissance and it bears many close affinities to England under the Tudors or the Periclian age of Athence. In the field of literature Śūdraka, Viśākhadatta and other less well-known poets are outshone by the brilliancy of Kālidāsa, who has been called by Rawlinson, 'The Indian Shakespeare'. In the sciences of mathematics and astronomy, the Gupta age was adorned by the famous names of Āryabhaṭṭa and Varāhamihira.

Arts found liberal patrons in the enlightened Gupta monarchs, and some beautiful works of sculpture were produced. The Greco-Roman influence seen in the Gāndhāra school has now been absorbed, and the sculptures are thoroughly Indian in spirit and technique. The cave paintings at Ajantā offer us lively gods, goddesses, Buddha in different poses, women, animals and birds with rich and varied floral settings. Their grace and charm, gaiety and love blended with the softness and elegance of a highly intellectual, refined and sophisticated society. Excellence of artistic design and taste are also noticeable in the rich varieties of gold, silver and copper coins issued by the richest and mightiest emperors of the age.

In the field of material progress and culture there was also life and spirit. Owing to the lightening

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up of agricultural economy all the lands were thoroughly organised with the help of departmental machinery, such as the record department, etc., and the demand for more cultivable land was gradually felt. Jungles and marshes were reclaimed and gradually brought under the plough. To cover the mounting expenses of the state taxation became heavy. The advanced condition of agriculture and horticulture is well brought out in the detailed descriptions of Varāhamihira, Kālidāsa and Amara. For the improvement of agriculture the state and individual citizens undertook irrigational schemes; the cow became a sacred animal owing to agricultural utility.

Pottery, metal work, jewellery, minting of coins, weaving, dyeing, stone-working and ivory-work made remarkable progress during this period. This industrial development brought beneficial results not only to society at large but also to the workers themselves. They were gradually recognised in the society and found a valued position in the local government of the day.

The internal trade seems to have been quite flourishing. Although as a result of Persian rivalry and barbarian invasions of the Roman empire the trade with the West was somewhat restricted; nevertheless, India's maritime relations with Egypt, Syria, Persia, Arabia, Ceylon, Cambodia, Siam, Sumatra, the Malayan Archipelago and China were very close. The balance of trade was sometimes in India's favour. Through the channels of trade her cultural expansion into the very heart of south-eastern and eastern Asia formed one of the most brilliant episodes of Indian history. The great tradition of Indian influence, extending from Ceylon to Tongking, was of course

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merely an endeavour to acquire material wealth. It was also aimed at religious ends. Vaishṇavism, Śaivism, Buddhism, all sought to take root in new soil and spreaded throughout Asia.

Again, the prosperous industry and trade produced other beneficial results in the economic life of the country. To facilitate trade and other transactions the Gupta emperors minted gold, silver and copper coins; and for the first time in ancient India, we have such an elaborate system of coinage in different metals. Individual traders and craftsmen faced with difficulties formed themselves into corporate organisations. We have reference to corporation of farmers, artisans, money-lenders, traders; and for the first time law-givers formulate elaborate rules on corporate life. All this material prosperity required adequate labour. Slavery and forced labour existed side by side with hired labour.

The Gupta age was, no doubt, a period of efficient political administration, and political stability was firmly rooted. It is, thus, natural to conjecture that the fortunate few had their fortunes assured, and formed a distinct class. They comprised the king, princes, administrative officials, high priests, rich industrial and business magnates etc. But the society as a whole that is, the poorer working classes — may not be assumed to be equally prosperous, for there are numerous references in Varāhamihira to devastating famine, droughts, floods, crop-failures, and many such natural calamities, which are mentioned as possible occurrences in India. Moreover, in *Brihatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira references to poverty, commercial failure, family ruin, and so on are so numerous that we must admit that, even in this

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period, the economic condition of many people was very precarious.

For certain specific reasons we can trust Varāhamihira. Though by tradition a protege of Vikramāditya, he was concerned with the production of working manual for astrologers who carried on their craft all over India; the astrologers were patronised chiefly by merchants, artisans and the better class of peasants. His forecasts seem to us to bear a closer relation to the real situation of the times than the idealistic description of the courtly Kāvya of Kālidāsa.

The Gupta Age may be called a Golden Age in the same sense as the Elizabethan and Victorian. These were times of great material and cultural prosperity with great civic buildings, public undertakings, splendour, opulence and luxury—but only for a limited section of the community. Beneath the facade of outward splendour were the toiling masses on whose efforts the whole edifice depended. To warrant the name of Golden Age, far better conditions would be required for the whole of society, for the peasant as well as for the lord, and economic freedom and prosperity for both.

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2. R. Thapar, p. 216.
3. Ibid.
4. Wells, p. 404.
5. Manu, i, 88.
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CHAPTER III

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

WE are here dealing with formal education and learning (or an organised system of teaching and learning). It should, however, be remembered that education need not necessarily mean formal education and that one does not always need an academic qualification to be educated. Rather there is a difference between schooling and education and proficiency in the former does not always guarantee the benefits normally associated with the latter, so that education in a broader sense can be better identified with maturity rather than with plain erudition. However, it is not within the scope of this monograph to assess how educated the average man in ancient India was on the basis of his maturity. It would then have to be assessed on the basis of how advanced civilization was at that period of time in India, since education and civilization are at least somewhat, if not to a large extent, related. But this would lead us further and further away from

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what is generally understood by the term education and it would be increasingly difficult to reconcile the subject with the topic, which is why in this work we will limit ourselves to the state of formal education and learning in ancient India.

To start at the very beginning, education in this country must have begun with the Indus valley civilization as far back as *c.* 2500 B.C. These people used a semi-pictographic form of writing, so there must have at-least been some among them who were literate. But unfortunately this is as far as our knowledge goes, for we know nothing more of their system of education.

A regular system of education was, however, introduced by the early Vedic Indians round about 1500 B.C. Definite codes on the subject were laid down in the law books end is possible for us to see how this system worked.

The academic career of the Aryan boy began after his initiation through the Upanayana ceremony whereby he became a full member of his class and society. Today this Upanayana ceremony is the same as the sacred thread (*Upavita* or *Poitay*) ceremony that a Brāhmin boy undergoes. Previously this rite was open to all except the lower castes, the ideal age for the purpose varying from 8 for a Brāhmaṇa to all for a Kshatriya and 12 for a Vaiśya. This were called the twice born, but since this term came to be applied more and more often to the Brāhmaṇas only, it must be assumed that the practice died out with the other castes. This took place, when he was about eight years old, but though a minor, he had taken the status of an Aryan, and it was now his duty to master the religious lore of the Aryans in order to prepare himself for the role of a householder.

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According to the ideal of the sacred texts, the training of the *Brahmachārin* (for the boy still had to remain celibate until he had completed his tenure of study) took place at the home of a Brāhmaṇa (or *guru*). He was, now, totally at the disposal of the latter and was expected to treat his master with the utmost reverence, ministering to all his needs and obeying all his commands implicitly. He began by learning how to perform various religious rites which were incumbent upon all the twice born and to a certain degree are still performed today.

The main subject of study was the Veda, and long hours were devoted to its mastery. The teacher would instruct the few students seated on the ground about him by rote and for many hours daily they would repeat verse after verse of the Vedas until one or more was mastered. Sometimes to ensure correctness, the hymns were taught in more than one way with various aids to memorization. This system of mnemonic checks and the patience and brilliant memories of many generations of teachers and students preserved the Vedas for posterity in much the same as that in which they existed nearly a thousand years before Christ.

The boys in the *guru's* home did not confine their attention wholly to the Vedic texts. There were other fields of study, notably the 'Limbs of the Vedas', or subsidiary sciences necessary for its proper understanding. These six Vedāṅgas consisted of 'Kalpa', the performance of sacrifice, 'Śiksā', correct pronounciation or phonetics; 'chandas', metre and prosody; 'nirukta', etymology, the interpretation of obscure words in the Vedic texts; Vyākaraṇa (grammar); and jyōtisa, astronomy, the science of the calendar, etc.

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Moreover, in post Vedic times teachers would instruct their students in the six schools of metaphysics, or in that school they specially favoured. Those versed in the sacred Law would expound it to their students, while others would teach special secular subjects, such as, astronomy, mathematics or literature. There were, however, more branches of study, eight different schools being referred to in the Purāṇas. They were Agnisthāna, place of fire worship, Brahmasthāna, place of Vedic learning, Vishṇusthāna, place for learning polity, economics and acquiring information, Mahendrasthāna, place for learning the art of warfare, Vivasvatasthāna, astrology, Samasthāna, botany, Garuḍasthāna, place for learning of transport and other means of communication, Kārtikayasthāna, place for learning the parade of soldiers and the art of warfare. These courses of study being rather extensive in themselves, it was not possible for any one person to master all of them so that herein we may suggest the beginnings of specialization in education.

The writers of Smriti envisaged all young men of the upper class as undergoing this training, but such was not the case. In fact it is doubtful, if more than a small proportion of young men ever went through a full course of Vedic education. Princes and the sons of chiefs and nobles were trained in arms and all the manifold sciences needed to fit them for Government services, while most boys of the lower orders probably learnt their trades from their father. The Buddhist scriptures in fact show that there was a form of apprenticeship, and the law books lay down rules governing it.

We might here in parenthesis include a small note

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on caste and its effect on education. In course of time Indian society came to centre round the caste system and as a natural corollary to it education too came to be caste oriented from the later Vedic and Epic periods. Teaching had at first been open to all, but in due course became a "total Brāhmaṇa preserve covering" both religious as well as secular studies. Even in learning the Kshatriyas were now relegated to the study of methods of Government and warfare; the Brāhmaṇa reserved for themselves the right to study and teach, to sacrifice and to give and receive gifts, that is, their studies were more or less religious oriented; the Vaiśyas, again, in keeping with the duties and function of their castes, had to prepare themselves for a career in trade, farming or industry, while it was the duty of the Śudras to serve the three higher castes and their education was fashioned accordingly. It was not thought necessary for the remainder, i.e. the outcastes, to have any short of education. Thus, each caste was educated to perform the functions it had been assigned in society.

Apart from the houses (or Āśrams) of the various *gurus*, as centres of education, certain cities became renowned for their learned teachers, and achieved a reputation comparable to that of the University cities of medieval Europe. Chief among these were Vārānasi and Takshasila (Taxila), which were already famous in the time of the Buddha; later around the beginning of the Christian era, Kānchi then called Kāsi was particularly renowned for its religious teachers, but Taxila in the far north west, laid more emphasis on secular studies. Among the famous men connected with Taxila were Pāṇiṇi, the grammarian

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of the 4th century B.C., Kauṭilya, the Brāhmaṇa minister of Chandragupta Maurya, and traditionally the chief master of the science of statecraft, and Caraka, one of the two great masters of Indian medical science. These University towns were veritable colleges and must be considered more advanced than the individual Āśrams, catering as they did to a tertiary state of education as it were.

Simultaneously with the spread of Buddhism and Jainism education came to be centred not in the teachers' home, but in the various monasteries (or Vihāras) as well. The postulants there were instructed in their various dhammas in certain institution, such as, Nālandā, there was scope for specialization, not only in the different branches of the Buddhist and Jaina canons, but also in the Vedas, Hindu Philosophy and the secular sciences. It would seem that the student population was not confined to the Buddhist order but that candidates of other faiths who succeeded in passing a strict oral examination were admitted.

Of these Buddhist centre of learning, the best known was the monastery at Nālandā. It was founded under the patronage of the Imperial Guptas and became the chief centre of learning in the country under Harshabardhan, until it was finally destroyed by Muslim invaders in the middle ages.

We might here note that the teaching of Buddhism was not limited to India, but also exported abroad. During the second, third and fourth centuries A.D. we are told that a number of monks went to China to translate Buddhist sutras, thus, no doubt, making an important contribution to Sino-Indian friendship. Though our records speak only of the

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spread of Buddhist teachings in China, this branch of Indian Philosophy must have been carried to other parts of Asia as well.

Teacher-Student Relations

According to the Smrities and the testimony of the Chinese pilgrim I-Tsing the relationship between teacher and student was always cordial and this spirit was carried down to the Toals, Maktabs and Mādrāssās where it was much in evidence at a much later date. The word 'cordial' is important; it means 'hearty', but if above texts meant to use it in this sense, it does not all tally with the rigid, authoritarian relationship between teacher and student that they go on to describe. If on the other hand 'cordial' is taken to mean 'Polite' as it is generally done today, then it is in the present context a gross understatement as we may presently see.

The above texts go on to say that "the relation between the teacher and the taught was just like a father and a son." Living, as the student did, in the house of his guru and becoming, as it were a member of the household, this might well have been so. But the relationship between father and son and even between teacher and student, if the situation till very recently can be taken to be a pointer, was far from hearty. On the contrary, it bordered on abject servility, so much so that it was considered almost criminal to disobey one's elders and if perchance anyone dared do the unthinkable he not only risked social ostracism but might proportionately also jeopardize his chances of attaining nirvana. Likewise the teacher was

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venerated throughout India and this is still true in many parts of the country. Thus, basing ourself on these deduction we think it would be more correct to say that the feeling evinced by the student for this guru was one of reverence, while the latter regarded his charge with condescension.

In order to maintain this relationship Yājnavalkya suggests that "the student must be grateful, not inclined to hate or prove false to his teacher, happy and not disposed to find fault. They should always be dependent and under the control of their teachers." This is further supplemented by Nārada who says that "the students should stay only with their teachers". We shall not attempt to assess how successful the teachers of ancient India were in maintaining these stringent psychological requirements. We doubt, whether it would be possible for any rational person to except these standards and yet be honest with himself. Nevertheless, without going into details it is possible to see that the mores governing teacher-student relations did not encourage independent thought and definitely not criticism—two very important necessities in the development of any rational philosophy. Perhaps, this is one reason, why Indian thought, after its initial outburst, gradually calcified, leaving the west to develop and more important continuously improve upon its ideas. This, however, is not to deny that Indian learning made absolutely no progress. As the Śyrian astronomer-monk, 'Severus Sebokht' writing in A.D. 662 says, "I shall not now speak of the knowledge of the Hindu, . . . of their suitable discoveries in the science of astronomy—discoveries even more ingenious than that of the Greeks and Babylonians of their rational system

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of mathematics, or of their method of calculation which no words can praise strongly enough..." This is high praise for Hindu learning, but one gets the impression that the ancients could have gone much further and maintained this lead had they not been hampered by the obligation to unquestioningly accept the written words.

The Smritis further enlighten us on student-teacher relations by suggesting that disobedient students like disobedient sons should be "punished physically". This could range from partial starvation to flogging, though Nārada promptly reveals the magnanimity of the ancients by adding that the unfortunate culprit should not be flogged on the head or chest, but only on the back and that too not in excess.

I-Tsing, the Chinese pilgrim, gives us some more information on the subject. He points out that the student was expected to help with the domestic chores in the guru's household. For example, he was to fold the teacher's clothes, sweep out the house and yard, draw the drinking water for his master and nurse him in sickness. The teacher on his part would look after all the needs of his charge—mental, physical, and presumably spiritual. He was, moreover, to remain celibate, as long as he was with his guru and was to pay "due homage and respect" to both him as well as the elders in the house. In most cases no money was taken from the student, the service rendered by him being considered fees enough, though as Manu points out, there were certain exceptions.

In this context it might be well worthwhile to include some observations by thinkers and writers like Kālidāsa on the subject. He says, "Knowledge imparted to a good pupil does not cause repentence; that

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the teaching of the dullard sharpens the intellect of the teacher." Gaṇadāsa further adds "instruction is good only when it stands the test in the presence of wise men, as gold is tested by means of fire", and again, "knowledge is to be esteemed for its own sake. He is a trader in learning who uses it only for earning his livelihood." These guiding precepts go to show some of the ideals that lay behind the teaching of a student in ancient India.

Some Centres of Study: Nālandā

As we have noted elsewhere, every Buddhist and Jaina monastery (Vihāra) was a centre of religious and secular learning. Fa-hien, the Chinese pilgrim, has left behind an exhaustive list of monasteries which by applying the last noted equation may be assumed to have all been centres of learning. Among the better known are Udyana, Suvastu, Gandhāra, Taxila, Purushapura, Nagarahāra, Mathurā, Saṃkāsya, Kanyakubja, Kośala, Jatavanavihāra, Kapilāvāstu, Rāmagrāma, Kushinagara, Vaiśālī, Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha, Gayā, Vārānasi, Kausāmbi, Champā and Tāmralipta. In this list, however, the monastery of Nālandā is conspicuous by its absence. This is because Fa-hien was in India during the reign of Chandra Gupta II whereas the University of Nālandā was established under the patronage of the later Guptas, Buddha Gupta, Tathāgata Gupta, Narasiṁha Gupta Bāliditya being among its patrons. Hiuen-Tsang, a later pilgrim, however, makes up for this deficiency and has left behind copious information about the university.

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Nālandā first appears in tradition as the birth place of Sāriputta, whose chaitya Aśoka is said to have seen. But its fame lies essentially with the great University that was founded there, its rise coinciding with the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. By the end of the fourth century A.D. the popularity of Nālandā Mahāvihāra as a centre of religious education and culture had reached far and wide and attracted scholars from both within and outside the country. We have references to Āchārya Nāgārjuna and his pupil Arya Deva from the south: he spent a considerable period of time at Nālandā. Their contemporary Suvishṇu erected "108 temples for the conservation of Abhidarma Pitaka", while in 400 A.D. we are told that the famous Buddhist logician Diṅnāga was invited by the University to a debate with the Brāhmana Sudurjaya and his associates. The presence of these celebrities no doubt enhanced the prestige of the place which was further augmented by its many impressive buildings which were the result of generous Gupta patronage. This surmise is corroborated by Hiuen-Tsang who adds that Nālandā was a residential University and an attractive one at that time. The students incidentally enjoyed free board and lodging and were not required to pay for their tuition either.

In this context it might be noted that residential Universities seem to cater to a selected few, which in this context would mean those who were truly interested in the subject concerned. This is contrary to the present Indian notion whereby a University is supposed to provide a standard education for the general local populace.

From what we learn from Hiuen-Tsang the

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University of Taxila was noted for its school of medicine, that of Ujjaini for astronomy, and that of Benaras for orthodox Brahmanical learning. But the greatest and most celebrated of all these Universities was that of Nālandā. Though it was a great centre of Buddhist learning, it offered a comprehensive course of study which included the study of the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Philosophy, Grammar, Śabda-Vidyā, Hetu-Vidyā, Yogaśāstra, Logic, the Upanishads, Mimāṁsā, the Dharmaśāstras, Itihāsa-Purāṇas, Medicine, Mathematics, and the so-called sixty-four arts. We are told that the standard of education was very high and that applicants were subjected to an oral test which they had to pass in order to be admitted. Hiuen-Tsang confirms this observing that though there were many foreign applicants only a few gained admission to the more advanced courses. Strict discipline was maintained and inmates could be expelled for misconduct or indiscipline. All this we learn from Hiuen-Tsang who was himself a student of Nālandā for five years studying the various branches of knowledge, especially Mahāyāna doctrines and philosophy. During his stay he claims that there were ten thousand students (or brethren) at the University, but as Dr. Basham says, "The remains of Nālandā, however, belie Hiuen-Tsang. The monastery consisted of a very large complex of buildings, but it could hardly have accommodated a thousand monks in anything like the comfort described by the Chinese traveller." "Bearing the unreliability of his figures in mind", Hiuen-Tsang then goes on to say that of these ten thousand, "one thousand were proficient in ten works of the Sutras and Śāstras; five hundred had graduated in thirty

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works, ten only including himself in fifty works, while Silabhadra, the saintly abbot of the monastery was the only master of all the works." These figures are no doubt inflated but serve to give some idea of the standard of proficiency reached. Other famous teachers of this institute were Jnānachandra, Dharmapāla, Chandrapāla, Gunamatī, Sthiramatī, Probhamitra and Jinamitra. The students spent all their time in study and discussion "helping", as we are told, "each other to perfection". Lectures on various topics were delivered to them from about a hundred different pulpits everyday, and judging from the atmosphere Hiuen-Tsang was probably not exaggerating, when he said that students considered them so important that they did not miss them even for a minute.

Such a system was bound to produce a very learned set of people who carried with them all the respect that would go with a prestigious institution of this sort. Hiuen-Tsang says that the Nālandā Mahāvihāra had acquired such a reputation that all those who claimed to be a "Nālandā brother" were treated with respect wherever they went, also an example of the great respect the people of India have had for learning and learned men.

Some time after the Gupta period, Harsha-vardhana of Kānyakubja became the great patron of Nālandā. It is said that he used to earmark a fourth of the revenue from the crown lands for rewarding great scholars. Next to the main building he erected another magnificent house over a hundred feet in height and dedicated it to the University. Moreover, he remitted the revenue of about a hundred villages to the University for supplying the students with

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clothes, food, bedding and medicine. Under such patronage Nālandā was bound to flourish.

Ujjaini

Ujjaini was another great centre of culture and learning, but not so much of a homogeneous unit like Nālandā. It was perhaps the home of the great poet Kālidāsa who is believed to have been the court poet of Chandra Gupta II Vikramāditya. After the Śaka War, Chandra Gupta brought great tracts of Western India under Gupta rule and some historians have suggested that his fascination for this ancient city of Ujjaini was one motive for his having done so. In any case he was deeply committed to its development and was proud to be called "Ujjaini-Puravara-Adhisvara".

Valabhi Mahāvihāra

Valabhi Mahāvihāra was another great centre of learning. Princess Dudda a niece of Dhruva I had erected a Vihāra there and subsequently in 580 A.D. another Vihāra was constructed there by Dharasena I. Thus as a result of royal patronage we are told that Valabhi was able to acquire a good library and both I-Tsing and Hiuen-Tsang have spoken highly of both its teachers and its system of teaching.

The State of Education

While discussing the state of education in the

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country during the Gupta period, it must be noted that lack of adequate material forces us to confine ourselves to the state of education in the royal households of the day. There might, however, be some truth in assuming that here, that is, in the royal families, and among the aristocracy, was where most education lay, though this no doubt was not the whole truth. Nevertheless, to go back to what we do know.

Kālidāsa and his literary contemporaries speak very highly of the literary achievements of royalty, but a more sober view causes us to believe that these litterateurs were more often than not carried away in flights of poetic fancy. Samudra Gupta, if Harisena's Allahabad Prasasti is to be believed, was a 'Kavirāja' (a king of poets), though this is the only evidence we have of his purported literary abilities. However, if the kings themselves were not literary giants, there is ample evidence to show that they did support and encourage literary genius. The court of Chandra Gupta II is said to have been graced by "the nine gems", presumably men of great artistic ability, since the analogy seems to be with a similar coterie maintained by the Mughal emperor Akbar; of whom Kālidāsa was one, while the Vākātaka king, Pravarasena II, is believed to have composed the Setubandah Kāvya in Mahārāstri prakrit. Harshavardhana, too, was not exempt from these literary yearnings either, and is said to have written the Nāgananda, the Priyadarsikā and the Ratnavali.

The great interest shown by these ancient rulers in the arts was not slow to rub off on their families and interestingly enough, the female members therein. From what we learn from contemporary literature, the ladies of the aritocracy were first given a

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grounding in general knowledge and then trained by experts in reading, writing, singing, dancing and various other accomplishments. We might in this context discuss the state of the education of women in the country at that time.

The Education of Women

It was then believed that the true function of women was marriage, and the care of their menfolk and children. As a result of it their higher education suffered considerably, although Vātsyāyana suggests that the daughters of the nobility should be well versed in the Kāma-Sutra and the sixty-four arts, while housewives should at least know how to handle the family budget and daily expenses. Nevertheless, the better class of women seem to have been educated, and there are several references in the works of Sanskrit poetry and drama by women authors of which some fragments survive. In Tāmil the early poetess Avvaiyar has left work of much merit, and a splendid metrical ode describing the great victory of the early Chola king Karikala at Veni is ascribed to an unnamed potter's wife. In Kālidāsa's play, Mālavikā-Agnimitra there is a reference to a lady Kausiki, who though a fictitious character well illustrates the accomplishments an educated lady of the time could achieve. She was learned, could speak Sanskrit, was tactful and most certainly very sensitive, because she seems to be a good critic of the arts of singing, dancing, and drama. Speaking of Mālavikā's ability as a dancer, she points out that her gestures are very expressive, that the

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movements of her feet are harmonious, and that the sentiment she wants to convey engrosses her completely. She was acquainted with the science of medicine and as far as education was concerned, could distinguish between a teacher who knew his matter but could not express himself, and one who did not have quite so much knowledge but could get it across to his pupils very well. Kausiki was to be sure only a character in a play but she does reflect the culture and graciousness a cultured lady of the time was able to develop.

As we have noted the ladies of Sanskrit courtly literature are often described as reading, writing and composing songs, and they seem to have been well versed in the arts of the time. Moreover, though from medieval times until very recent years the arts of music and dancing were looked on as quite unfit for respectable Indian girls, and were only practised by low-caste women and prostitutes, this was not the case in ancient days, when well-to-do girls were taught singing and dancing as well as other lady-like arts, such as painting and garland-making. We may, thus, presume that ladies from well-to-do families were, to varying degrees, educated, if not in all the branches of learning, at least in the feminine arts. As for the rest of women-kind we will have to assume until informed to the contrary that they, judging from the social structure, were trained only to look after their families and were, therefore by our definition, uneducated.

General Standard of Education

To go back to the general state of education in

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the country, we have another index to the level of education, and that is the use of Sanskrit. It must be remembered that the general populace spoke Prakrit or the different regional languages, whereas, it was only the educated who used Sanskrit, it being the language of the learned. Here, an apt analogy may be made with the use of Latin in relation to the various vernacular languages in medieval Europe. We are told that the king, his ministers, high officials, generals, hermits, Kaunchuki, harlots, charioteers, stage-managers (Sutradhara), the actors and dancing masters like Gaṇadāsa and Haradatta used Sanskrit. On the other hand, the Vidushaka (or jester), the gate-keeper, the constabulary, the fisherman, and the ordinary women and children spoke Prakrit. The inference here would, therefore, be that people connected with the court, with religion and University and with the arts used Sanskrit, while the lesser people in the more mundane walks of life used Prakrit. It has, however, been pointed out that people using Prakrit could often understand Sanskrit, though they might not have been able to read or write in the language.

The results of the education received may also be seen in the numerous inscriptions left behind by the Guptas. The Allahabad Prasasti, an eulogy composed by Samudragupta's minister of War and Peace, Harisena, is, apart from being a very informative record of Samudragupta's doings, also a fine piece of literature. Similarly, Vatsabhatti, the author of the Māndāsor inscription of Kumāragupta I and Bandhubarman, made another literary contribution in Sanskrit. Judging from these and the other Gupta inscriptions, the prose and Kāvya style had matured in the hands of

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the host of writers. The legends on the Gupta coins, too, go to show some of this maturity in style.

So great was the intellectual activity in the Gupta age, that it has sometimes been called the period of the Hindu Renaissance, and in fact it does bear some resemblance to England under the Tudors. In literature, there was the great poet Kālidāsa, whom incidentally Prof. Rawlinson calls "the Indian Shakespeare", whose brilliance unfortunately has caused other writers of lesser merit like Sudraka and Visākhadatta to be almost totally forgotten. The sprat of literary activity can also be seen in the many works of literature composed in this period. In the fields of mathematics and astronomy which was peopled by such great thinkers as Aryabhatta and Varāhamihira, Indian discoveries received ample recognition throughout the civilized world. Knowledge was coveted, and Hiuen Tsang writing in the seventh century A.D. was impressed by a class of wandering 'Bhikshus' (religious beggars) who acquired wisdom through constant travel and were not tempted to forsake this seeking even by the favours and honours bestowed by kings.

But the Chinese pilgrim would, in the case of educational institutions, agree that the heydays of the Buddhist and Jaina Vihāras, with the possible exception of Nālandā and a few others, were gradually passing away. The Buddhist system of education which had been open to all on merit was slowly supplanted by the older Brāhmanical culture and system of education. The caste system was, in course of time, growing increasingly rigid, and education came to be confined by religious law to the Brāhmana and other higher castes of society. The Śūdras, the

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outcaste caused by intercaste marriage, and the tribal people were completely debarred from education and were restricted to learning the profession assigned to them by Brāhmin law. The newly instituted system of child marriage, moreover, further cramped the opportunities open to the education of women. Mass education, if it could ever be called that, thus came to be restricted to a certain class of people, who alone were considered pure enough to receive and pass on the knowledge of the Vedas. Then, came the Moslem invasions which wiped out from this country the last remaining vestiges of Buddhist education. Brahmanism prevailed. Today Brahmanism is a much maligned philosophy, but it must be said to its credit that through its strict laws it was at least able to preserve for posterity something of the great culture India had once enjoyed.

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CHAPTER IV

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AJANTĀ WOMEN

THE patrilineal family was the basis of social as well as political life. Monogamy was the prevalent form of marriage but polygamy was not unknown. Except the marriage of Draupadi there is virtually no reference to polyandry. The status of women was, however, fair. They normally controlled the household. Some of them were apparently educated and cultured, for the Saṁhitās contain hymns composed by women. Education was open to them and some of them, Gārgi, Maitreyi and others, distinguised themselves in this sphere.

But in the later period women gradually held the inferior position in family and in society. Polygamy was widely practised by the kings and the richer classes; they could not inherit property. Gradually they were also deprived of the right of performing religious rites with their husbands. L.D. Barnett has rightly estimated the position of our early Indian

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womanhood. "With the father of the household was associated the mother, who received as much, and sometimes even more, reverence. Woman per se, however, did not rank high in the eyes of the law, which laid down as a principle that a woman is for all her life in tutelage, first to her father, then to her husband, and lastly to her son. A wife who bore only daughter or no children at all could be superseded by her husband marrying another woman, who then took preference over her. Even under the most favourable condition the nuptial bed was not one of roses for the wife. She was expected to show her devotion to her husband by the most humble and minute services, preparing all the meals of the household, eating the food left by her husband and sons, washing the kitchen vessels, smearing the floor with burnt cow-dung, and respectfully embracing her lord's feet at bedtime."[1] But her manifestation in our temples and caves tells us a different story; she rather holds a dignified position in family and society and the painters—Buddhist monks at Ajantā and Ellorā—are quite successful in depicting her in homely and astonishing manner.

The picture of 'The Dying Princess' is in the Sixteenth Cave.[2] It shows the drooping form of a woman attended by other women, and the composition has a rhythmic flow of line that well conveys the poignant story. The unbound hair of the princess that hangs over her shoulder, contrasting with the elaborate head-gear of her attendants, was a good idea of the artist, for it serves to enhance the lines of lassitude. This woman is beautiful like all the women of the Ajantā paintings. The needful expression is conveyed in the pose of the figure. That calm face

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the artist would not spoil with unwanted realism, lest we should forget that we were onlookers of the most cruel of all human tragedies, the death of a beautiful woman. A very similar scene is treated quite differently in the Seventeenth Cave, where a queen, sick unto death, reclines upon the broad and anxious breast of her royal husband. Here too the exquisite face, the lovely form are painted by the artist in all their rich perfections. To have sacrificed these essentials for a meretricious delineation of the ravages of illness, or the agonies of approaching dissolution would have been a sacrifice of everything. Artists thought rightly in those days; and just as our masters of fiction and verse are judged by general consent to prove their greatness according to their power of presenting women, so by their paintings of women, the masters of Ajantā have justified their title to mastership. Burne Jones painted all his figures with expressionless faces, and thereby followed the example of the best Greek sculptures. He, thus, sacrificed too much by so strict a convention. Such bondage to any convention would have been foreign to the whole spirit of the Indian painters, whose art at Ajantā is a free and joyous art, unshackled, and light as the air.

Whatever other standards of beauty may exist outside the human species, for normal man, woman must always represent the most decorative element in the world. The Ajantā masters use woman as their best decorative asset with brilliant zest, and extraordinary knowledge. Woman is the finest achievement of their art, and obviously its most admired theme. They cannot apparently have too much of her, and introduce her on every possible

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occasion, whether relevant to the theme or otherwise, in every possible way, but under one aspect only—that of beauty.[3]

The artists use women like flowers: garlands of girls surround their Rajas and their Princes, embellish their palaces,[4] dominate their street scenes, crowd the windows of their cities and are often painted, as in the delicious panel in the First Cave of the Queen and her maids giving alms to a mendicant, for the sheer joy of painting them, and with no perceptible literary or religious intention.[5] When they do not weave their women into garlands, these artists scatter them as single blooms, or by twos and threes over the walls. As Apsarās on radiant Paris, they float across the porches; as Sirens they lure the sailor to his doom. But chiefly they shine for us as mortals, and as mortals these artists depicted them best, and most often. They painted them at the toilet, in repose, gossiping, sitting, standing, always with a sort of wonder akin to awe.[6]

The Ajantā artists could adopt conventions for their Buddhas, and had their sacred symbols, and their orthodox attitudes; but their women are always unconventional. They did not pose as women; the artists simply copied their poses. They were content to learn from their gestures to portray their nature. Women had for them a decorative value altogether too precious to be diminished by laws. She was outside the laws of Art, for she made them. They learned from her. They struggled to reproduce every turn of her head, every curve of her form, every glance of her eyes. She enthralled them with her airs and graces. They produced tirelessly and with a discriminating knowledge her bewildering coiffures;

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they decked her in painstaking manner with the most beautiful trinkets they could devise.

When they could not paint 'her', they painted her pearls and ornaments all around their columns. I can think of no parallel to this frank and chivalrous 'woman-worship' of Ajantā. Nowhere else perhaps has woman received such perfect and ungrudging homage. Even the beggar girl who asks for alms in the Seventeenth Cave is beautiful. The truth is that they could not conceive of 'woman' otherwise. As she truly inspired them so they gave back to her in kind these graphic gifts of a whole-hearted admiration. In spite of her obvious reality one feels at Ajantā that 'woman' is treated not as an individual, but as a principle. She is there not just as female, but as the incarnation of all the beauty of the world. Hence, with all her gaiety and charm, she never loses her dignity; and nowhere is she belittled. Everywhere in this garden of flowers, we behold in full-bloom rose in its pride and perfume—nowhere the trampled lily. Woman has been treated by the Ajantā artists not just as a woman in the normal sense of the term but the very quintessence of 'Beauty on earth'.

A woman in anguish is in the First Cave. She bends low before the king whose sword is drawn to slay. The drawing of the figure is superb. But more wonderful is the art that at such a prodigious moment chose to conceal the face of 'Beauty'. Only the bent head is seen above the out-stretched hands—little sensitive hands that hover about, but do not venture to touch the feet of the inexorable destroyer. The impending doom is just, but how marvellously has the artist caused us to feel 'the pity of it'. The guilt of the offender is forgotten in the

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contemplation of the awfulness of 'Beauty' about to be destroyed.

Thus, woman is nowhere degraded from the proud and prominent position she holds. We believe that for these artist-monks all 'Beauty' was one, just as for them all life was one. There was no very great distinction, therefore, between 'physical and moral Beauty'—not enough to make it necessary to remove their women more than a few inches from Buddha. In the lovely picture of the mother and child adoring Buddha in the Seventeenth Cave, the painter has dwelt with loving care upon every ringlet of the woman's hair, every exquisite feature, every curve of her supple form as though he glorified Buddha himself by endowing his worshipper with so much loveliness.[7]

Woman always seems to confer as well as to receive at Ajantā. She is, as a general rule, neither a plaything nor a temptress, but equally with man does homage to her Creator. And if the men seem more especially to present to Him the gifts of holiness, she offers in His sight own incomparable dower of 'Beauty'.[8]

It is woman the 'sister' that we see in these religious panels, as also we see her as the 'Beloved'. Very beautiful are these love scenes. In the First Cave, there is a fine composition of a Nāga king and his queen conversing happily together.[9] The piquant upturn of the lady's face as she glances slyly at her 'Lord and Master', and the latter's look of tenderest affection have a lyrical sweetness. In the somewhat similar picture outside the Seventeenth Cave, there is an air of dainty roguery about the scene where two bright-eyed girls peep through a lattice at the seques-

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tered lovers, and the whole subject is drawn with a light hand and lighter heart. Moreover, most of the portals of the caves are sculptured with numerous reliefs of couples, intensely interested in one another. They may be Gods and Goddesses, but they are most certainly lovers, and they are happy.[10] Perhaps that is woman's chief function at Ajantā, to radiate happiness. We can never forget her; we never wish to forget her as we see her here. She is here restored to us, wholly loveable, wholly beautiful, wholly untarnished; and the monk-artists clothed her as she shall ever be clothed, in 'Majesty and Power'.

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CHAPTER V

STANDARD OF MORALITY AND JUSTICE IN JĀTAKAS

"BUDDHA, the Light of Asia", is said by many great people of the world; and his life and teachings are the red book of human civilization. At Varanasi (Benaras) he uttered the "Four Noble Truths"—i.e. the life is painful; pain is caused by a constant craving for sexual delights, pleasure, material things. But the pain will cease when a man is emancipated from desire and the way that leads to the cessation of pain which is his noble eight-fold path—viz. right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thinking and right concentration. For next forty-five years Buddha ranged through north India, addressing multitudes, converting thousands. He was primarily a moral teacher. He, thus, preaches, "All we are is the result of our thoughts. If we speak or act with evil in our mind, pain follows us as a wheel follows the hoof of the beast that draws the cart. If we

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speak or act with a pure heart, bliss follows us like our shadow." Abiding by his 'Noble Truths' means victory over all evil motives—abstention from greed, lies and slander, patience and compassion with all creatures.

According to our time-honoured Hindu belief our soul, on our death, enters another body, human or animal.[1] It is Buddha himself who first traced a picture of the 'Wheel of Life'. Between the spokes he showed the categories of existence—spirits, demons, animals, human beings in various stages of beatitude and doom. All creatures, Buddha taught, are fettered to the turning wheel, which jolts us from existence to existence. But unlike the Hindu faith, Buddha held out the hope of escape of those who walk the Path. Freed from the prison of rebirth, with its attendant pain, they enter into *Nirvana*, that eternal, blissful state that knows no craving, no delusion, no death.[2]

Mass conversion to Buddhism took place within a short time; all classes of people could join the brotherhood and it looked like a peaceful army, marching towards Nirvana. The Buddhist brotherhood was organized much like the begging orders of medieval Europe. All disciples enjoyed equality. Each follower solemnly vowed chastity and poverty. They were to keep no personal possessions except thread and needle, a begging bowl, a rosary and a razor with which to shave their heads in token of humility. They were to own a single yellow robe made from discarded rags. Later on it was amended to 'three robes' after a cold night during which Buddha had to put on extra clothing.[3]

Around this 'mob of beggars' there grew a

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Buddhist lay community of families and individuals pursuing normal family lives. Among his lay disciples was king Bimbisara. He presented Buddha a bamboo grove at Rajgir (Rajagriha), where they prepared a humble shelter from the monsoon rains. The king's tradition was followed up by many lay worshippers; they, then, erected houses which became good many monasteries in our land. Buddha usually spent the rainy season in one of the monasteries; but he was always happier out of it. The serenity and solitude of forest attracted him more and more. Often he would withdraw for long periods to some lonely spot for fruitful meditation. Buddha had strong affinity with the creatures of the wild. There are stories of monkey bringing him a honey comb, and a venomous snake snuggling into his begging bowl. His love for animals opposed the Hindu ritual of animal sacrifice. He, perhaps, made no distinction between the human and the animal world and set ethical ideals of love, affection, fellow-feeling, justice and many other moral ideas for the good of human and animal kingdoms. About 550 birth stories of Buddha give us a clue to the subject.

Jataka legends occur even in the Canonical Pitakas, for instance, the Sukha-Vihari Jataka and the Tittira Jataka and the Khandhavatta Jataka are found in Culla Vagga;[4] similarly, Sutta and Vinaya Pitaka contain 35 Jatakas in verse. The Sutta and Vinaya Pitaka are generally accepted as at least older than the Council of Vesali held in *c.* 380 B.C.[5] Even Jataka scenes are found sculptured on the railings of Sanchi, Amaravati, Bharhut, etc.;[6] and the titles of the several Jatakas are inscribed there in Asokan Brahmi. These bas-reliefs undoubtedly signify that the birth

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legends of Buddha gained popularity long before third century B.C. Its popularity reached far and wide. In 400 A.D. the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien visited Ceylon and saw at Abhayagiri "representations of the 500 bodily forms which the Bodhisattva assumed during his successive births".[7]

As regards the high moral ideal preached by the Jatakas, we may refer to a few examples here. The Law of Justice is upheld in the famous 'Kukkura Jataka'.[8] When Brahmadatta was reigning in Benaras (Varanasi), the Bodhisattva came to life as the head of several hundreds of dogs. One fine morning the caretaker of the palace carriage and horses reported to the king that all the leather straps were gnawed by dogs. The king was so enraged that he at once ordered his men to kill all the street dogs; large hosts of dogs were killed. "But nothing happened to the real culprits", said Bodhisattva.

When the king was on his seat in 'the hall of justice', Bodhisattva appeared before him and his argument with the king is a wonderful piece of universal justice. He argued with the king just like a learned lawyer. Bowing down to the king he said, "Is it you who are having the dogs destroyed?" "Yes, it is I." "What is their offence king of men?" "They have been gnawing the straps and the leather covering of my carriage." "Do you know the dog who actually did the mischief?" "No, I do not." "But your majesty, if you do not know for certain real culprits, it is not right to order the destruction of every dog that is seen." "It was because dogs had gnawed the leather of my carriage that I ordered them all to be killed." "Did your people kill all dogs without exception; or are there some dogs who

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are spared?" The king said, "Some are spared -- the thorough-bred dogs of my own palace." Bodhisattva, then, said, "Sire, just now you are saying that you have ordered the universal slaughter of all dogs wherever found, because the dogs had gnawed the leather of your carriage; whereas, now, you say that the thorough-bred dogs of your own palace escape death. Therefore, you are following the four Evil Courses of partiality, dislike, ignorance and fear. Such courses are wrong, and not king-like. For kings in trying cases should be as unbiased as the beam of a balance. But in this instance, since the royal dogs go scot-free, whilst poor dogs are killed, this is not the impartial doom of all dogs alike, but only the slaughter of poor dogs." And moreover, the Great Being, lifting up his sweet voice, said, "Sire, it is not justice that you are performing."[9]

After listening to his words, the king said, "Do you in your wisdom know who is the real culprit?" "Yes, Sire." "Who is it?" "The thorough-bred dogs that live in your own palace." "How can it be shown that it is they who gnaw the leather?" "I will prove it to you." "Do so, sage." "Then send for your dogs, and have a little butter-milk and *kusa*-grass brought in." The king did so. Then says the Great Being, "Let this grass be mashed up in the butter-milk, and make the dogs drink it." The king did so. After that all dogs used to vomit and bits of leather are found. "Why, it is like a judgement of a perfect Buddha himself", cried the king overjoyed, and he did homage to Bodhisattva by offering him the royal umbrella. And the Bodhisattva taught the Truth in the ten stanzas on righteousness in the Te-sakuna Jataka, beginning with the words: "Walk righteously,

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great king of princely race ..." Then having established the king in the Five Commandments and having exhorted his majesty to be steadfast, the Bodhisattva handed back to the king the white umbrella of kingship. The king also ordered that "the lives of all creatures should be safe from harm". He also instructed that "all dogs should have a constant supply of food".[10] Similarly, king Sivi of Aritthapura pulled out his own eyes in favour of a blind man; and the Mahakapi Jataka is another good example of self-sacrifice. Thus, there are numerous examples of ethical norms, which reflect the great culture and civilization in the world of living, in our 550 Jatakas.

In this context we must remember another important characteristic of Hindu religion. Buddhism took over the Hindu doctrine of rebirth and *Karma* but moralised it. Rebirth in heaven is no longer due to performing animal sacrifice or the infliction of self-torture, but to practising the virtue emphasised by Buddha, almsgiving, truthfulness, forgiveness of enemies and others. Those teachings are in the Jataka stories but doing good actions can never lead to salvation. The aim of the disciple is not to accumulate merit, but to win Insight. The Jatakas expound teachings which lead to enlightenment, such as the doctrine of impermanence, belief in the Buddha, the rejection of superstitious rites, freedom from lust, hatred, and delusion, and other bonds. And following that Noble Path one can reach the final stage of Nirvana (Salvation); and the above ethical concept is the symbol of human civilization.

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CHAPTER VI

COINAGE AND CULTURE

ANCIENT India saw her golden age under the banner of the Guptas and the root of the Hindu civilisation took its strong hold in this period. "An impartial historian", said Havell, "might well consider that the greatest triumph of British administration would be to restore to India all that she enjoyed in the fifth century A.D."

In the realm of numismatics, conservatism was a very strong force in ancient times; the early gold issues of the Guptas, therefore, closely resembled those of the later Kushāṇas to whose imperial position they succeeded in the north. The obverse of the Kushāṇa prototype of gold coins—the king standing and offering incense at the altar—is very common in the earlier stages of the Gupta coinage. The Hindu king is also to be seen wearing the Kushāṇa overcoat and trousers. His name is written perpendicularly under the arm as on the Kushāṇa prototype. There was, however, a definite move to Hinduise the type

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soon afterwards. The coins of the Archer type of Samudragupta and the Battle-axe, Couch, Tiger-slayer and Aśvamedha types are quite original in their conception and show no foreign influence whatsoever. Their execution is generally very fine and the high water-mark of Hindu numismatic art may be seen in the Aśvamedha type of Samudragupta and the lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II which are by far the best specimens of coins struck in ancient India. The art, however, began to decline in the reign of Kumāragupta I. The latter no doubt introduced two new types—the Peacock type and the Elephant-rider type but his coins show a definite artistic deterioration which was later accentuated by the declining fortunes of the empire.

Chandragupta I is the earliest Hindu ruler whose inscribed gold coins have been handed down to us. No ruler either of the Maurya or the Suṅga or the Sātavāhana dynasty issued any gold coins. The practice was started by the foreign Greek and Kushāṇa rulers and Chandragupta I was the first national king to adopt it. Probably he started his gold coinage at the time, when he assumed the Imperial title. This took place rather late in his reign, when his conquests had invested him with sufficient importance. On his gold coins we have the names and figures of the king and the queen on the obverse and the name of the Lichchhavis on the reverse. It is clear that in spite of the growing greatness of the Guptas the Lichchhavis might have insisted in maintaining their separate identity in the dual kingdoms. We have not yet got a single coin of Chandragupta I where the name of the Lichchhavi clan and princess does not appear on the reverse and obverse respectively. Samudra-

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gupta paid considerable attention to his coinage. He was not content to issue coins in a single type. He introduced a pleasing variety in his coin types and his example was emulated by his successors as a consequence of which we possess in Gupta gold issues the most artistic series of gold coins ever issued in ancient India. So far seven coin types of Samudragupta are known. Of these the Standard, the Archer and the Battle-axe types refer to his military activities and the Aśvamedha type commemorates their successful culmination. The other two types give us a glimpse into some of the hobbies of the great emperor. The Tiger-slayer type shows that the emperor took keen interest in wild game and the Lyrist type discloses how he used to spend his rare leisure hours in his palace in playing on the lute. The statement of Harisena, that his patron excelled Tambaru in musical skill, was thus not without some foundation. Whether Samudragupta composed any poems we do not know. But there is no doubt that he is the first king in ancient Indian history to introduce metrical legends on coins.

The reign of Chandragupta II is remarkable for its numismatic novelty. Minting of gold coins was done more extensively during his rule than in any prior or later reign. Chandragupta II's silver coins are few. The silver currency was confined to the new provinces of the empire during the reign of Chandragupta II. This Emperor also started using copper coins. During the greater part of the reign of Kumāragupta I there was tranquillity and prosperity in the empire which is reflected in his coinage. His gold coinage is extensive and shows as many as fourteen types. Their artistic merit is high and

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many of their metrical legends have considerable poetical merit as well. He extended the silver currency to the Gangetic plain and issued for his home province a new type of silver currency showing no traces of foreign influence. He, however, practically discontinued the issue of the copper currency. People were generally accustomed to the use of cowries for small daily transactions. Kumāragupta I probably thought that copper currency was hardly worth the trouble and expense it involved. Gupta mints were fairly active during the reign of Skandagupta. His silver coinage is as copious as that of his father, he supplanted some of its types by introducing new ones like the Bull and the Altar types. But his gold coinage is much less copious and shows only three certain types. The financial strain of the Hūṇa war had also told upon the treasury, for many of his gold coins are heavily adulterated. Among the later Guptas, Kumāragupta II has left us numerous gold coins. But they are all heavily adulterated, gold being only about 57%.

So far Indologists have studied Gupta coins mainly for the sake of political history. But their value for the study of the life and culture of that period should not be ignored. One of the functions of money is that it serves as a store of value. In ancient India, when banking system was very crude and underdeveloped, hoarding was a common practice. As many as 16 hoards of Gupta coins have so far been discovered from different parts of the empire. The great majority of the obverse legends of the coins of the Guptas have not been hitherto satisfactorily explained. As a rule each specimen only contains a few words of the legends, it is rare to find

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legible vowel marks. While a number of legends must await decipherment until further specimens are available the majority cannot be read with certainty.

During the age of the Guptas usually the emperor reigned independently in his own right. But there were certain exceptions to this usage. Chandragupta I, the first sovereign of the Gupta dynasty, ruled his kingdom giving due importance to his Lichchhavi queen Kumāradevi as their names and effigies appear on their coins probably as the result of a political compromise. This coin shows on the obverse Chandragupta I standing to the left wearing close-fitting coat, trousers and head-dress, earrings and armlet holding in left hand a crescent-topped standard bound with fillet and with right hand offering an object which on some coins is clearly a ring to Kumāradevi who is wearing loose robe, earrings, necklace and armlets and high fitting head-dress. Only in the Aśvamedha type of coins issued by Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I is found the image of his chief queen.

Chandragupta II, we all know, was a great devotee of Vishṇu. But no one had ever thought that he might have issued a coin type showing himself as a direct recipient of prasada from Vishṇu manifesting himself before his royal devotee for that purpose. And yet this is what we visualise on the single coin of the unique Chakra-Vikrama type for the first time disclosed in the Bayana hoard. The Bayana hoard also shows that Kumāragupta I was perhaps the greatest devotee of the science of numismatics in the Gupta dynasty, for it discloses for the first time as many as 5 new types, such as the King and the queen, the Chhatra type, the Lyrist

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type, the Rhinoceros-slayer type and the Elephant-rider-lion-slayer type. The people of this age had their own indoor as well as outdoor games. Hunting was probably an aristocratic amusement.

An important feature of royal life at this age was the institution of umbrella-bearers. At Ajantā along with this royal umbrella can also be seen the other attributes of royalty—the fly-whisk and the foot-stool. A royal umbrella (or parasol) is the symbol of supremacy. This parasol which was the emblem of royalty can be seen on several Gupta coins which are styled as coins of the Chhatra type. On such coins of Chandragupta II the emperor is seen standing with his left hand resting on his sword-hilt, while behind him is a dwarf attendant holding the royal parasol over him. It is not unreasonable to assume that the king appeared and departed in public especially in an Assembly Hall in this manner.

Gupta gold coins supply a rich material for the study of contemporary costumes, weapons, furniture and horse accoutrement. The Gupta period is not only distinguished for its political achievements but also for its art, architecture and other spheres of material culture. To take an instance the fashions in hair-dressing, costumes and ornaments in this period show an artistic trend of mind which delighted in elegant innovations. The artistic arrangement of pleats and folds of dhoti and sarī, the graceful way of wearing dupattā and the carefully arranged knots of kamarbanda testify that the people were not unaware of the aesthetics of dressing. For the study of Indian costume in the Gupta period there are a very large number of Gupta coins bearing the portraits of kings, queens and goddesses. A very

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significant fact in the costume of the kings is that they wear tunics and trousers like the Kushāṇa kings, though goddesses and queens appear in purely national costume. The convenience and also the elegant art of sewn garments must have appealed to the highly artistic but practical commonsense of the Guptas. The coarseness and heavy barbaric art of the Kushāṇa garments gave place to elegance and finish. In this age the top boots of the Kushāṇas also lost their heaviness and were reduced to the shape of modern riding boots. The adoption of sewn garments by the horse-riders and a section of soldiers of the Gupta period also reveals Śaka influence. The common articles of wear in Gupta costume are dhoti, dupattā, sāri and kamarbanda. The sewn garments of a woman are called chola and kurpasaka. Chola seems to have been a tunic and kurpasaka seems to have been a close-fitting bodice. Both of them appear on Gupta coins. The costume of a Gupta king is described in the Mudrārākshasha as varabaṇa decorated with the circles of pearls and jewels, tiara and the flower garland worn across the chest. There is little doubt that varabaṇa here is the same as the tunic with pointed ends appearing on Gupta coins. The circles on them indicate the decoration of pearls and jewels. The method of wearing dhoti is common on the coin portraits. The dhoti had its one corner set in front a little below the navel, the pleated end was tucked behind and it was so girt up as to show a part of the thighs. Usually the kings on Gupta coins are shown wearing full boots decorated with buttons. On the authority of the Brihat Kalpasutra Bhāsya these boots could be identified with khallaka, ardha-khallaka, khapusa

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and jaingha types. Apparently these shoes had fasteners. An analysis of the costumes of the kings and queens and the goddesses reveals the following interesting details.

Chandragupta I wears a helmet or close-fitting cap which is usually beaded and tunic with pointed ends with embroidered front or neck. At one place traces of oblique lines perhaps indicate fastings. He either wears trousers or dhoti with a pleated corner dangling between the legs and boots reaching a little below the knees. His tunic was often secured with a kamarbanda. The dress of Samudragupta is more varied. In Archer type he wears a beaded skull cap often decorated with streamer which was hemispherical, conical or peaked. He usually wears the tunic with pointed ends secured by a kamarbanda (or a belt). He wears trousers of churidār type, trousers with pleats and shalwars. He also wears dhoti in combination with the tunic and dupattā. The buttoned top boots are worn. In Lyrist type he merely wears a skull cap and a short dhoti. These are suitable clothes, when the king is in his private chamber. In the Archer type he wears a turban with a plaque, tight fitting tunic, kamarbanda and dhoti. In Lion-slayer type the dress appropriate to the occasion is simple. The king wears a flowered cap, light turban with a plaque, head scarf, half-sleeved tunic without pointed ends, shorts, dhoti, langot and kamarbanda.

Coins also give us a picture of the furnitures and weapons used during the Classical age. There are many kinds of stools with machine turned like legs. Their forms are either rectangular or oblong. Some of the sofās are provided with high backs and were

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probably cushioned. The bed resembles its modern prototype. It was at times provided with a back. The moḍhā or asandi seems to have been used very extensively. It was hour-glass shaped or bell-shaped. The moḍhā which was apparently made of cane was decorated with zigzag and leafy pattern. The umbrella was a simple affair without ribs. The Gupta coins also represent certain interesting types of weapons. The recurved bows are of many kinds. The battle-axes, swords and knives have also been represented in different forms.

T.S. Eliot in his brilliant set of essays which he called the Notes Towards the Definition of Culture says, "no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion; according to the point of view of the observer the culture will appear to be the product of the religion or the religion the product of the culture." So the primitive and ancient culture of a people is considerably reflected through their religious outlook and their religious history is very much indebted to the science of numismatics, since it enables us to trace the evolution of religious movements. Thus, in course of time through the evolution of social and cultural life many gods and goddesses had appeared in the religious fold in the Classical age. Elaborate rituals and ceremonies had also developed and found proper representation in contemporary coins and inscriptions.

Like other ancient rulers the Gupta emperors were highly religious in their daily life and in fact under their steady patronage Hinduism got a new lease of life. From innumerable epigraphic records, we learn that temples and Brāhmanas, and Buddhist and Jaina monasteries were liberally endowed with land and

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money by the emperors, queens, ministers, royal officials, guilds and wealthy citizens for their own religious merit and for that of their predecessors and successors. Numerous Gupta coins throw light on the religious thinking and practice of the Gupta emperors. Our ancient thinkers have recommended four stages or asramas of life such as brahmacharya, gārhastha, vānaprastha and sannyās. According to this system one should lead an austere life as a student at his teacher's residence, as a married householder, as a hermit and lastly as a wandering monk with all his earthly ties broken. The ultimate goal of life is, however, to attain moksha (or liberation). It was considered the ideal scheme of life. From time to time at least some of the emperors tried to follow the above scheme of life which was reflected on their respective coins. In boyhood and in youth the education and training of the royal princes were very well taken care of by their fathers and grandfathers. Thus, we have an able set of rulers and conquerors among the early Gupta emperors. In later life they attached equal importance to their family life—as a householder whose dutifulness was the source of dharma, artha, kāma and moksha. Thus, a very happy married life is reflected on a good number of the Gupta coins. Besides great political significance the Chandragupta-Kumāradevi type of gold coins had great social and religious value in the life of Chandragupta I.

The King-queen-on-couch type of gold coins may be grouped as the "family coins" of Chandragupta II. On the obverse of the coin the Garuḍa standard is visible and on the reverse the king is shown dressed in dhoti and not in his usual royal dress. The queen

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is dressed in sāri and bodice. The couple are shown facing each other and sitting on the couch. Both of them are wearing jewelleries and are looking very graceful. Chandragupta II offers a sinduradāni to his beloved queen in a relaxed and homely atmosphere. Kumāragupta I was an ideal lover and husband. His coins bear a touch of romanticism. On the obverse of the King and the queen type of gold coins Kumāragupta I is seen offering a bunch of flowers to his queen.

The Gupta monarchs recognised the importance of the presence of their queen in their great religious ceremonies. Only the chief queen (Mahādevī) was allowed to play the part of Hotri (worshipper) along with her husband in the Aśvamedha sacrifice. The Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I testify to the above fact. The queen of the emperor was also crowned with certain titles of honour.

Not only the queen, but also perhaps the queen-mother had an important role to play in the family and public life of the prince and emperor. Some evidence in this respect is furnished by the coins which have been identified by A.S. Altekar as the King and Lakshmi type of gold coins issued by Skandagupta. Altekar's identification is not without doubts and Skandagupta possibly issued those coins to commemorate his victory over the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras in the closing years of the reign of his father or the early years of his reign. The female figures on both the obverse and reverse of the above coins has been identified by Altekar as Lakshmi. The identification of Lakshmi on the reverse of the coins is quite reasonable. As usual the goddess, nimbate, is

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seated on a lotus and she holds a noose in her right hand and lotus in left. But on the obverse the female figure is not nimbate and she holds no noose or cornucopia. She is standing before Skandagupta in usual dress with a lotus flower in one hand and in the other hand she holds "some other object" as a sort of blessing for her son who is about to start his march against the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras. The Garuḍa standard in the centre, the bow and arrow in the king's hand and his military attire suggest his impending departure for the battle-field. It is something unusual that on both the sides the female figure is the same (i.e. Lakshmi). According to the Hindu tradition it would be better to identify the figure on the obverse with the queen-mother and this type of coins should be known as "the Queen-Mother and the King" type instead of King and Lakshmi. But a point arises here. Nowhere in the inscriptions of Skandagupta has the name of his mother been mentioned. This has led some scholars to think that he was probably an illegitimate child of Kumāragupta I. Keeping this view in mind it should appear highly irregular that Skandagupta would allow the portrait of his mother to be stamped on his coins and not mention her when giving a detailed account of his genealogy.

The third stage of the ideal life was vānaprastha. Normally after fulfilling all his duties and responsibilities in private and public life and at the retiring age perhaps Kumāragupta I preferred to renounce the world and the whole scene has been beautifully represented by his "Apratigha" type of gold coins. There are three figures on the coin. Although their significance is not yet fully solved, Prof. A.S. Altekar

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has given some tentative suggestions. The central figure is undoubtedly Kumāragupta I since he is expressly described as such. The lady on the right may be his queen and the soldier on the left his general or the crown prince. Both of them are expostulating with him. Can it be that the emperor is contemplating renunciation and that his queen and general or crown prince are trying to dissuade him without success? The folded hands on the chest of the emperor may indicate his inability to accept their arguments. He is firm in his resolution and is, therefore, described on the reverse as Apratigha (or invincible).

The "summum-bonum" of Hindu life was also expressed by the emperors on their coins. After discharging the duties of a householder and performing penance and austerities in vānaprastha one likes to attain heaven. It is the blessed end of Hindu life and it was desired by every Gupta ruler. We can refer to a few instances from the Gupta coins. The obverse of the standard type of gold coins of Samudragupta runs thus—"Samara-sata-vitata-vijayo-jita-ripurajita-divam-jayati"—the invincible (king) who has won victories on a hundred battle-field and conquered enemies, wins the heaven. Again, in the Kācha coin "Kācho-gamavajitya-divam-karmabhir-uttamair-jayati"—having conquered the earth Kācha wins the heaven by excellent deeds. Considerable emphasis used to be laid on good deeds of men, thus, even the king who was a lion among men having conquered the earth wins heaven by good deeds—"Gamavajitya-sucharitaih-divam-jayati". The substance of some of the legends on coins expresses and confirms the well-known Indian idea that

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by the merit acquired by sacrifice one may become equal to the gods or become an Indra and attain to heaven. According to the "Satapatha Brāhmaṇa", the world of heaven is said to be the reward of the sacrificer. The means by which heaven is attained are sometimes specifically expressed by such phrases as karmabhiruttamaih or sucharitaih.

The achievements of the Gupta emperors must be remembered for the great reformation of the Hindu society and religion. The conceptual evolution of gods and goddesses along with different religious practices can be studied from their coins. In this connection we must note that the importance of the kings is predominant as compared with that of their queens on the Gupta coins. But strangely enough the goddesses are more in number than their male counterpart. From a careful study of the coins, inscriptions and seals we come to know that Vishṇu and Lakshmī were their favourite god and goddess. Sri R.D. Banerjee, thus, remarks, "they are distinctly Vaishṇavas". In their large number of coins and inscriptions the Gupta emperors assumed the title of Paramabhāgavata. They also used Garuḍa seals, Garuḍa standard and Garuḍa on their coins. Garuḍa was the vehicle of Vishṇu and Lakshmī was the consort of Vishṇu. Specially Lakshmī the goddess of fortune with lotus flower in one hand or cornucopia in another hand is very commonly visible on the coins from Samudragupta to Vishṇugupta. Thus, Lord Vishṇu was perhaps worshipped by the emperors for strength, vitality and energy and his consort Lakshmī was worshipped for wealth and fortune. A circular wheel apparently the Vishṇu-Chakra is also visible in some of their coins. In the

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Chakra-Vikrama gold coins Vishṇu himself offers three circular objects, most probably sweetmeats, to Chandragupta II who was a great devotee of Vishṇu. He also created Garuḍa-dhvaja at the famous tirtha of Vishṇupada somewhere on the Beas in the Punjab. He, thus, claimed to have received direct favour from his favourite deity and for this special favour he became invincible in warfare.

Lakshmī, the goddess of fortune, seen sometimes seated on throne or on a lotus with a cornucopia signifies the horn of plenty, that is, the Gupta empire would be "overflowed with flowers, fruits and corns". Sometimes, she simply holds a lotus flower in her left hand as a mark of her divine blessing on her devotee. But almost everywhere attached to her right can be seen a noose. Thus, the goddess of fortune, it will seem, wants to maintain a permanent tie with the Gupta rulers. Sometimes, Lakshmī is seen scattering wealth and fortune in the form of coins. She is also fond of feeding a peacock from a bunch of fruits. She always appears in a sari and bodice which indicate a cordial and informal relationship between her and her devotee. Her figure appears graceful and her demeanour calm and mother-like from the reverse of the Standard, Archer, Battle-axe, Lyrist types of gold coins of Samudragupta; Kācha gold coins; Archer, Horseman, Chhatra, Couch, Standard, Chakra-Vikrama types of gold coins of Chandragupta II; Archer, Horseman, Swordsman, Elephant-rider, Elephant-rider-lion-slayer, Chhatra, Apratigha types of gold coins of Kumāragupta I; Archer, King and Lakshmī (or Queen Mother), Chhatra, Horseman types of gold coins of Skandagupta and the gold coins of Narasiṃhagupta and Vishṇugupta.

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Besides Vishṇu and Lakshmī, the emperors also worshipped many other gods and goddesses. The effigy of Ambikā (or Durgā) seated on a lion is also seen from the gold coins of Chandragupta-Kumāradevi type, Lion-slayer coins of Chandragupta II, Lion-slayer and King-queen types of coins of Kumāragupta I. She is the same as Siṃharathi or Siṃhavahini of our Epic and Purāṇic literature. Another female deity worshipped by the Gupta emperors was the Makaravahini Gaṅgā. She is on the obverse of the Tiger-slayer coins of Samudragupta and Rhinoceros-slayer coins of Kumāragupta I. The river goddesses Gaṅgā and Jamunā were well known in the Gupta art. Śiva was also worshipped by the Gupta rulers. He is represented by his Trisula (Trident) on the reverse of the silver coins of Kumāragupta I and Nandi (Bull) on the reverse of the silver coins of Skandagupta. Kumāragupta I was named after Kumāra or Kārtikeya. The Kārtikeya and the peacock type of gold coins were intended to pay special homage to Kārtikeya. In some of his silver coins also, the peacock, the emblem of the deity, is present.

The rituals and ceremonies as a part of their refined culture were expressed through their coins. After completing his conquests Samudragupta performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice which was long in abeyance after the reign of Pushyamitra Suṅga. A special type of Aśvamedha coins were issued by him to commemorate this event and for giving fees (or dakshiṇā) for participating priests and others. The ritualistic injunctions prescribe the distribution of fabulous sums of money on these occasions. His Aśvamedha type of gold coins prove beyond doubt

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that he had performed at least one sacrifice. The reverse legend is Śrī-aśvamedhamahendra.

Along with the social development the position of women had greatly improved. They had a fair share of culture and education. Some of them were even very good administrator. For instance, the Vākāṭaka queen Pravābatīguptā ruled the empire for nearly a quarter of a century. The marriage ceremony of Mahārājādhirāja Chandragupta I and Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī is also represented by the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coins. On the obverse of the coins Chandragupta I is offering an object presumably the marriage ring to his queen. His son Samudragupta was proud of his Lichchhavi relation and described himself as the Lichchhavi dauhitra. These give rise to the assumption that the matrimonial relation with the Lichchhavis materially contributed to the political greatness of the Guptas.

Many of the Gupta monarchs had more than one wife. But only the Pradhāna Mahisi (or the chief queen) of the emperor played a very significant role in the religious and social life of the emperor. On the reverse design of the Aśvamedha type of gold coins Dattadevi is holding a chowrie over her right shoulder and on the left field there is a sacrificial post. Mahādevī Anantadevī is also seen on the Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Kumāragupta I. On the obverse of Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Samudragupta and his grandson Kumāragupta I a horse is standing before a decorated yupa (sacrificial post) enclosed within a platform. There is "Srī" (or Siddhaṃ) beneath the horse. On the reverse of the coins the chief queen is holding a chowrie (chāmara) over her right shoulder and a piece of cloth in her

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hand. There is an object in front of her which resembles a spear. According to the Kātyāyana Srauta Sutra the Mahādevī is required to fan and wash the horse and then clean the animal with towel. The spear-like object is actually a needle (suchi). It is stated in the same Śāstra that there should be three needles of gold, silver and copper. After the horse is sacrificed the three queens of the king are to puncture its body by needles in order to facilitate the passage of the sword by the emperor into its body. The Mahādevī is to use the gold needle, the favourite one the silver and the discarded one the copper.

The Gupta emperors might have celebrated their special marriage anniversaries by minting coins. We may cite two such examples here. On one occasion Chandragupta II offers an object, apparently a Sinduradāni as identified by A.S. Altekar to his favourite queen. Both of them are in informal dress, sitting face to face on couch. It is beautifully presented on his King and queen type of gold coins. In the similar manner Kumāragupta I is shown offering Anantadevī a bunch of flowers. These coins also indicate a very peaceful family life of the Gupta emperors. The attachment of the royal couple is revealed through the lyrist type of coins of Kumāragupta I which show the king deeply absorbed in playing with his lyre and his queen listening to the music sitting by his side with a flower in her hand.

The Gupta coins also reflect the material culture of the emperors. Some of them were interested in instrumental music. Samudragupta is seen on his gold coins playing a lyre. He is dressed only upto his waist. The other favourite pastime of the Gupta emperors was hunting and a great many hunting

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scenes were depicted on coins. They attacked the animals from horseback, elephant and on foot. The Archer type of coins depict the scene of hunting excursions (or mrigayā) with bow and arrow. Some coins also express the royal love for birds. The peacock type of gold coins of Kumāragupta I show the king feeding fruits to the peacock. The refined taste of the emperors is expressed through the fine selection of their furnitures and costumes. There are different varieties of the thrones, bedstead, moḍhā, umbrella, fly-whisk, stools, foot-stools and spittoon. Their decorative designs speak highly of the art of carpentry.

So far as the exchange value of the Gupta currency was concerned, by spending 2, 3 or 4 dīnāras one could purchase one kulyavāpa of land which amounted to a large area. Moreover by depositing 10 and 12 dīnāras benefactors expected to maintain an alms-house out of the interest of the sum as long as the sun, the moon and the stars endured. All these references undoubtedly show that the gold coins had a very high purchasing power. They were not likely to be used in small transactions.

There was a remarkable development of Sanskrit in the Gupta age. The Gupta emperors were first to start the practice of giving the coin legends in beautiful metrical lines. Notable among them are the following:

Prithivītalāmbaraśaśi Kumāra Gupto jayatyajitah
Jayati nriposibhirajitah.
Prithivītalaśvarendrah Kumāragupto jayatyajitah
Bhartā Khadgatrātā Kumāragupto jayatyaniśam.

These lines would show that the poets of the

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Gupta age were particularly fond of using figures of speech like upamā, utpreksha, ślesha, etc.

The splendid gold coinage of the Guptas with its many types and varieties are the finest examples of Indian art. Slight traces of Hellenic influence can be noticed from the effigies of the kings on almost all of the Gupta gold coins. Just like the Kushāṇas and Indo-Greeks everywhere the king wears a close-fitting cap, coat and trousers. But in Indian manner they have earrings, necklace, ring, armlet, etc. along with other Indian objects, such as Garuḍa standard, peacock and so on. The figures of the queens of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī, the Aśvamedha coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I and the different figures of goddesses on coins are purely Indian in origin and style. They are in loose robe, earrings, necklace, armlets etc. On most of the Gupta gold coins the king is exhibited with masculine figure with arms and ammunition which are the predominant signs of ancient life and culture. On some coins they are about to kill a tiger, lion and rhinoceros. Only on certain types of coins such as the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī, Lyrist type of coins of Skandagupta, Chakra-Vikrama coins of Chandragupta II, Peacock coins of Kumāragupta I, the king has appeared before us in the most sober and fashionable colour. Again the high-sounding titles used by the kings on their coins also reflect the power and magnificence of the Gupta sovereigns to a certain extent.

The splendid Gupta coinage with its many types and infinite varieties and its inscription in Classical Sanskrit are the finest examples of ancient Indian art. As specimens of art they are the best and have

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hardly any parallel in any other numismatic series. A comparison is usually made of Gupta coins with the Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian coinage. But the latter series represents a tradition of numismatic art that was foreign to India. This foreign tradition was gradually absorbed and assimilated by the Indian mint masters.

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CHAPTER VII

INDIA AND HER NEIGHBOURS IN TRADE AND CULTURE

THE impact of Indian trade and culture in the neighbouring countries is traced as early as third century B.C. if not earlier. Indians migrated in large numbers to Malaysia and Indonesia in ancient times. We find place-names in Sanskrit in Sumatra, Java, Champa, Kambuja, Suvarnabhumi and Suvarnadvipa bearing unmistakable evidences of the early cultural and commercial, if not political, colonisation of the Western Pacific by the Indians. The earliest inscriptions so far traced in Champa (Viet Nam), Java and Borneo were inscribed in the Brahmi script of north Indian variety and in Sanskrit language. Isolated centres of trade and commerce like the famous 'Agency Houses' of much later period in the Indian sub-continent, developed gradually into big cultural zones and finally into the Hindu colonies and empires like that of the 'Sri-Vijaya' in Indonesia and

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the Hindu kingdoms of Champa and Cambodia in Indo-China. Side by side with them small local sanctuaries gradually developed into colossal architectural marvels like the Borobuder, Prambanan of Java, and Bayon, Angkor Wat of Indo-China. Indian merchants, princes, priests, monks, intellectuals both Brahmanical and Buddhist cooperated intensively with the gifted indigenous populations. Thus the foundation was laid of the 'Greater Indian Concept' which was of course predominantly a cultural expression of the collaboration of the races and nations. Thanks to the blessings of message of universal brotherhood (Maitri) preached by Lord Buddha and applied in the domain of statecraft by Emperor Aśoka in the third century B.C., the Indians were foremost in preaching and practising world fellowship in the enormous Indian-Ocean-Pacific region extending from Malaysia and Indonesia to Micronesia and Polynesia. Thus in the broad sense economic and cultural relations were the basic factors in the formation of international brotherhood.

Transcontinental Trade

It is very interesting to note that the trade motive and the trading habits among the Asiatic nations developed through the ages by politico-economic and socio-cultural processes. Good many Chinese records help us to understand how this process developed gradually over the centuries between China, India and Central Asian countries. In 91 B.C. the Chinese annal *Shih-Chi* writes, "when the first embassy was sent from China to An-Shi (Parthia),

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the king of An-Shi (Parthia), as was the usual practice, sent a military general along with a band of soldiers to receive and offer him a guard of honour on the frontier of his kingdom. On a return visit the Parthian king sent an embassy to the Chinese court with large birds' eggs, jugglers from Li-Kam . . . at which His Majesty was highly pleased."[1] In B.C. 140 to 86 the Chinese Emperor Wu-ti also did the same and the Parthian king as usual sent him "large birds' eggs and jugglers from Li-Kam".[2] Another contemporary record is more explicit about the problems of land and sea voyage. *Hou-han-shu* records that the Parthian Emperor sent an ambassador to the Court of Chang-ho in A.D. 87 "with lions and fu-pa. The fu-pa has the shape of a lin (unicorn) but has no horn. In return the Chinese Court sent Kan-Ying as an ambassador to Parthia . . . when about to take his passage across the sea, the sailors of the western frontier of An-hsi (Parthia) told Kan-Ying: The sea is vast and great; with favourable winds it is possible to cross within three months; but if you meet slow winds, it may also take you two years. It is for this reason that those who go to sea take on board a supply of three years' provisions. There is something in the sea which is apt to make man home-sick, and several have thus lost their lives. When Kan-Ying heard this, he stopped. In the thirteenth year (A.D. 101) the king of An-hsi (Parthia), Man-Ku, again offered as tribute lions and large birds from T'iao-Chih (ostriches), which henceforth were named An-hsi-Chiao (Parthian birds)."[3]

Another Chinese annal *Hou-han-shu* gives a detailed account of the trade practices of the contemporary period. The country of Ta-ta'in is also called

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Li-chien (Li-Kin) and is situated in the western part of the sea. "The defence of cities are made of stone. The postal stations and mile-stones on the roads are covered with plaster. There are pine and cypress treas and all kinds of other trees and plants. The people are much bent on agriculture, and practice of planting of trees and the rearing of silk-worms ... The country contains much gold, silver and rare precious stones, especially 'the jewels that shine at night', the moonshine pearl, corals, amber, glass, langkan (a kind of coral), chu-tan (cinnabar ?), Ching-pi (green jade stone), gold-embroidered rugs and thin silk-cloth of various colours. They make gold-coloured cloth and asbestos cloth. They further have fine cloth also called Shui-yang-ta'ul (i.e. down of the water sheep); it is made from the cocoons of wild silk-worms. They collect all kinds of fragrant substances, the juice of which they boil into su-ho (storax). All the rare gems of other foreign countries come from there. They make coins of gold and silver. Ten units of silver are worth one of gold. They traffic by sea with An-hsi (Parthia) and T'ien-chu (India), the profit of which trade is ten fold. They are honest in their transactions and there are no double prices. Cereals are always cheap. The budget is best on well-filled treasury. Their kings always desired to send embassies to China, but the An-hsi (Parthians) wished to carry on trade with them in Chinese silk, ... (166 A.D.) ... one is not alarmed by robbers, but the road becomes unsafe by fierce tigers and lions who will attack passengers, and unless these be travelling in caravans of a hundred men or more, or be protected by military equipment, they may be devoured by those beasts."[4]

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From a study of the ancient records of China it appears that the volume of transcontinental trade involving China, India and other countries gradually increased and different trading nations became more and more benefited. *Chin-shu*, referring to the economic situation of A.D. 265 to 419, records that Ta-ta'in is also known as Li-Chien (Li-Kin) situated in the western part of the western sea. "Their country exports much gold and precious stones, shining pearls, and large conches; they have the jewel that shines at night, and asbestos cloth; they know how to embroider cloth with gold thread and weave gold-embroidered rugs. They make gold and silver coins; ten silver coins are worth one gold coin. The inhabitants of An-hsi (Parthia) and T'ien-Chu (India) have trade with them by sea, its profit is hundred-fold. The water of the great sea which is crossed on the road thither is salty and bitter, and unfit for drinking purposes; the merchants travelling to and fro are provided with three years' provisions; hence there are not many going."[5]

The author of *Sung-shu* referring to the period of A.D. 420 to 478 had a very fine sense of humour. He remarks that Buddhist religion along with Indian articles of trade over-flooded the market of China. "As regards Ta-ts'in and T'ien-Chu (India) far out on the western ocean, we have to say that, although the envoys of the two Han dynasties have experienced the special difficulties of this road, yet traffic in merchandise has been effected and goods have been sent out to the foreign tribes, the force of winds driving them far away across the waves of the sea . . . All the precious things of land and water come from there, as well as the gems made of rhinoceros' horn

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and king-fishers' stone, serpent pearls (she-chau) and asbestos cloth, they are being innumerable varieties of these curiosities; and also (the doctrine of) the abstraction of mind (in devotion to) the lord of the world (Buddha, Shih-Chu); all this having caused navigation and trade to be extended to those parts."[6] Moreover, good many Chinese records of the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. refer to profitable trade both by sea and land to different Asiatic countries.[7] For instance, Ta-ts'in, the country on the Red Sea ('west of sea') used to export gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, tin, tortoises, white horses, red hair, tortoise shell, large conches, cornelian stones, southern gold, king fishers' gems, ivory, real white pearls, amber, corals, ten colours of opaque glass, viz. carnation, white, black, green, yellow, blue, purple, azure, red and red-brown, rock, crystal, realgar, orpiment, five colours of pi, ten kinds of jade, viz. yellow, white, black, green, a brownish red, crimson, purple, gold, yellow, azure, and a reddish yellow, five colours of rugs, gold embroideries, gold colour cloth, asbestos cloth, curtain interwoven with gold, 12 kinds of vegetable fragrant substances.[8]

Trade Routes—Land and Sea

Long-drawn commercial activities of different Asiatic peoples made them come closer to one another and religion, art and literature worked as their unifying bond. By the humanising effects of Buddhism the Central Asian route became more and more safe for the travellers, merchants and missionaries.

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As early as 138 B.C. the Chinese Emperor sent Chang K'ien to open up the Central Asian route. Chang K'ien was finally able to reach Bactriana and returned back to China in 126 B.C.[9] He then submitted a detailed report to the Emperor about Ta-yuan (Ferganah), An-hsi (Parthia), Ta-hia (Bactria), Li-chin (Li-kin), T'ien-chu (India), etc. He also made some important discovery when he was in Bactriana, he was very astonished to see that cotton and bamboo stuff from the South-Western provinces of China were being sold in the local market.

These, he heard, had been brought by Indian caravans through Northern India and Afghanistan.[10] It was very impressive report to the Chinese Emperor and he took necessary steps to open up routes to the Middle East and to India. The Hunish and the other barbaric settlements on the western part of China and its neighbourhood were conquered by the Emperor. He also undertook many military operations in Central Asia. By the first century A.D. many small kingdoms of that region accepted the suzerainty of the Chinese Emperor. He then sent regular embassies to a large number of Asian countries at regular intervals. As soon as safe passage through Central Asia was assured, traders, merchants and Buddhist missionaries from all directions began to pour into the Chinese Empire.[11] A good many Chinese records help us to understand this problem.[12] As early as A.D. 65 two Indian Buddhist missionaries Dharmaraksa and Kasapa Matanga arrived in China and according to tradition they spent the rest of their lives there. They translated into Chinese the famous 'The Sutra of the Forty-two Sections' containing the rules of initiation, ordination and the

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code of conduct of monks. In appreciation of their works the Chinese Emperor built the 'White Horse Monastery' in their honour.

By the middle of the first century A.D. the Buddhist missionaries were very active in South China; and the Emperor Ming-ti gave official recognition to Buddhism in China. Buddhism thus brought the two countries, India and China, closer together, and the Buddhist missionaries became the most active agents in uniting the two peoples by cultural ties. As a natural corollary of it a brisk trade developed between the two countries.[13]

It appears from our records that Buddhism spread from India to Central Asia and China even before trade contacts were established between the different countries of this vast region of Asia. The routes which were used by traders in this region were in all probability first traversed by Buddhist monks. Primarily Buddhist routes, they eventually developed into famous commercial routes of Asia between India and China. Obviously the earlier expansion of Buddhism facilitated the growth of commerce in those countries. This process was the reverse of what happened at the time of European expansion in Asia in modern times when Christianity followed the European traders, and then came their empire-building activities.

The countries lying on the route from Kashgar to China, which are collectively called by historians and geographers as 'Ser-India', first imbibed Indian culture and then developed into important trade centres. They were Po-lu-Kia (Bharuk) near Uch-Turfan, K'iu-tse or Kin-ye (Kuci, mod. Kuchar), Yen-K'i (Agni, mod. Karasahr), Kao-Ch'ang (Turfan)

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and many others. And the accompanying map would further explain the position of the Asiatic trade routes.

Nepal, Tibet, Assam-Burma Route to China

One trade route passed through the Brahmaputra valley in Assam, Burma and Yunnan and the other ran through Nepal and Tibet. There was an indirect contact between India and China by way of Assam before the second century B.C. Indian domestic fowl along with some other articles first appeared in China in the late Shang period.[14] But these trade routes by their very nature were difficult and discouraging to the travellers. Unhealthy condition of the countries through which they passed, scarcity of food and drink, insecurity of roads due to barbarian inroads very much discouraged the travellers to take those routes. However, the Assam-Burma route to China started from Pataliputra (Patna), passed through Champa (Bhagalpur), Kajangal (Rajmahal), Pundravardhana (North Bengal), Kamrupa (Gauhati), Burma and finally reached Yunnan-fu (Kun-ming) in South West China.

Sea-Route to South East Asia and China

From the prehistoric times maritime people in the coastal regions of India were acquainted with the crude means of navigation. But with the Aryanisation of India the art of navigation and ship-building developed slowly and steadily. A few centuries

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before the Christian era merchants, missionaries, priests and political fortune-hunters had learnt to take advantage of this traffic by sea. As recorded in the tradition Aśoka sent a Buddhist missionary to Subarnabhumi.

Names like Indo-China, Further-India, Insulindia, Indonesia, etc., which are applied to various parts of South East Asia and the Far East are as significant as 'Ser-India'. This region is geographically an extension of India and Ptolemy rightly calls it "Trans-Gangetic India". From the ancient times Indo-China became a sort of buffer state between India and China. Along with the slow expansion of the Aryan culture from India there took place a regular infiltration of the Chinese culture from the north.

Moreover, the traditional dance and puppet theatres in many South East Asian countries, in Thailand, Malaya and Java for example, continued to fascinate their audiences with the adventures of Rama and Sita and Hanuman, Bhima, Arjuna and others. In Bali an elaborate Hindu culture still flourishes, and preserved intact many Indian ideas and practices which have long passed out of use in the sub-continent. Thus, the Indian impact on South East Asian civilization is indeed very great.

Articles of Trade

Our present study would be incomplete, if we do not say a few words about the articles of trans-continental trade. From the very earliest time India had trade-relations with Ceylon.[15] Ceylon played a distinct role both in the foreign trade of the island

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and in the inter-oceanic commerce between the East and West. Situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean and to the extreme south of the Indian peninsula, Ceylon enjoyed a strategic position commanding the sea-routes that linked one side of the ocean with the other. The best notice of Ceylon's importance as an entrepot is found in the work of Cosmas.[16] Being in a central position, it was much frequented by ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia (East Africa), and it likewise sent out many on its own.[17]

From the remotest countries east of the Cape Comorin, Ceylon received silk, aloes, cloves, sandal-wood and other products. There again came from Male (Malabar) where pepper grew. Calliana (near Bombay) exported copper and sesame-longs and cloth for making dresses, for it was also a great place of business. From Sindhu came musk, castor oil and spikenard.[18] Moreover, the king of Ceylon gave a good price both for the elephants and for the horses coming from the Indian marts. The Indian traders brought horses to him from Persia and the king of Ceylon used to buy them, exempting them from custom duties.[19] But we know very little about Ceylon's export trade to India. Varahamihira mentions Ceylon as the home of good pearls from oysters.[20] Fa-hien also notices the pure and brilliant collection of pearls from the sea of Ceylon.[21] These may have been one of the exports of Ceylon to Tamralipti (Tamluk) and the other north Indian marts and probably silver was also imported into India from the silver mines of Ceylon, for there were no silver mines in India. Moreover, the Rajatarangini mentions that cloth manufactured in Ceylon was

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worn by the queen of Kashmir.[22] The anonymous author of the Periplus also mentions that Ceylon produced muslins.[23]

Her commercial relations with China were also flourishing. Fa-hien himself went to China on a merchant vessel.[24] The chronicle 'Sung-chu' states that all the precious things of land and water came from India.[25] Gems made of rhinoceros' horns and king-fishers' stones, serpent pearls and asbestos cloth, they are being innumerable varieties of these curiosities, were imported into China from India. According to the *Chin-hsi-yu-chiu-t'u* rare stone came to China from the countries of Chi-pin (Afghanistan or Kashmir).[26] Moreover, po-tie (a fine textile, probably muslin) was produced in India;[27] and as early as A.D. 430 Indian po-tie was sent to China from Ho-lo-tan on Java.[28] In A.D. 519, King Jayavarman of Fu-nan (Cambodia) offered saffron with storax and other aromatics to the Chinese court.[29] Laufer also suggests that in the sixth century saffron was traded from India to Cambodia. In the T'ang Annals, India in her trade with Cambodia and the interior orient, "export to those countries diamonds, sandalwood and saffron".[30] But we know very little about the Chinese exports to the Indian marts, except silk. So far as we know from our contemporary sources Chinese silk was very popular in the ancient world. Cosmas refers to China as the 'land of silk'.[31] It had a good market in India. Kalidasa mentions this silk fabric (*Chinamsuka*)[32] as one of the most fashionable textiles among the richer sections of society. Silk and silk-products were also much demanded luxury articles even in the reign of Harshavardhana.[33] They were also in great demand

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in Arabia, Parthia, many other smaller states of the Middle East and in the Byzantine Empire.[4] The exchange in trade and commerce, thus, brought about the prosperity of the two famous lands of antiquity.

Indo-Chinese maritime relations not only affected the fortune of the two great nations, but also influenced the many other minor states and island countries through the media of trade. Through the channel of trade, Indian culture flowed all over South East Asia and India's cultural relations with them seem to have been mostly in one direction, which fact tempts many Indologists to claim Malay Peninsula, Siam, Cambodia, Indo-China, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo and Indonesia as the ancient colonies of India.

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INDEX

Ajantā 77-83
Artistic heritage 10-11
Bhakti movement 25-27
Buddhism 19-24, 43-45
Buddhist pantheon in art 23-24
Coinage, as reflection of culture 91-111
Dama 14-15
Dāna 14-15
Dayā 14-15
Education
  and the caste system 61
  centres of 61-63, 66-70
  general standard of 73-76
  introduction of 58
  state of 70-72
  subjects of study 59-60
  teacher-student relationship 63-66
  women's 72-73
Gandhāra school of art 46-47
Guptas 49-56
India's trade and culture impact in neighbouring countries 112-124
Indian art
  Buddhist pantheon in 23-24
  profile of 27-32
  traditionalism in 33-37
Indian culture, as reflected by coinage 91-111
Indian culture, essential features of
  artistic heritage 10-11
  attitude towards womanhood 13-14
  Dama, Dāna and Dayā 14-15
  Expression of conduct and Sanskrit heritage 5-6
  harmony with nature 15-16
  Mahābhārata 6-8
  protest movements 16-27
  Rāmāyaṇa 8-10
  social structure and aim of life 11-13
  tolerance and synthesis 3-4
  universal outlook and respect for the individual 4-5
Jaina doctrines 18-19
Jainism 17-19
Justice, standard of 87-89
Kushāṇas 41-49
  Buddhism 43-45
  coins 42-43
  Gandhāra school of art 46-47
  general prosperity 42
  intellectual and literary activities 47-49

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other forms of religion 45-46
Mahābhārata 6-8
Mauryas 38-41
Morality, standard of 84-87
Nālandā 66-70
Rāmāyaṇa 8-10
Trade
articles of 121-124
land and sea routes 117-121
transcontinental 113-117
Ujjaini 70
Valabhi 70
Women
cultural significance of 77-83
education of 72-73

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Plates

1. 121 Quarter panel from ceiling of ante-chamber, Cave II
2. 120 Panel from ceiling of shrine-chamber, Cave II
3. F. 9, From wall-painting A, Cave I
4. Belur (Hassan Dist, Mysore) Andal temple, general view from south, *c.* 12th Cent., Southern Karnata style Soapstone AIIS Neg. A14.62
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